HARUM SCARUM MARRIED

BY

ESMÉ STUART

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HARUM SCARUM MARRIED

By the same author:

HARUM SCARUM

HARUM SCARUM'S FORTUNE

HARUM SCARUM MARRIED

By ESMÈ STUART

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION—THE MOTHER OF THE TROUBADOURS	7
I.	TWO COUNTRY GENTLEMEN	12
II.	NEW MEMBERS	27
III.	THE PRICE OF LIES	41
IV.	THREE LOVERS AND ONE LOVE	49
V.	A NIGHT EXCURSION	56
VI.	O ANCESTORS!	66
VII.	SYLVIA THE FORSAKEN	76
VIII.	AFTERNOON TEA	84
IX.	TALLY HO!	92
X.	A SWOONING LADY	104
XI.	THE FABER FAMILY	112
XII.	HIS LADY'S GLOVE	121
XIII.	THE STORY OPENS	129
XIV.	A GENIUS	139
XV.	A FAIRY GODMOTHER	146
XVI.	A RESCUE	156

CHAPTER		PAGE
XVII.	A MEETING OF THE SOCIETY	165
XVIII.	A NOBLE DEED	173
XIX.	A TEA-PARTY	182
XX.	"MY DEAR HOPE"	190
XXI.	LEARNING TO BEG	200
XXII.	WHAT LOUIS SAW	209
XXIII.	MR. RUSSELL'S WOOING	219
XXIV.	A CONQUERED KNIGHT	227
XXV.	GREAT REJOICING	236
XXVI.	A SPECIOUS BEGGAR	244
XXVII.	IN THE LAKE	252
XXVIII.	IN THE SHADOW	261
XXIX.	SUDDEN NEWS	269
XXX.	SUSPENSE	277
XXXI.	A DEATH AND A WEDDING	287

Harum Scarum Married

INTRODUCTION

THE MOTHER OF THE TROUBADOURS

About thirteen years ago, a doctor's daughter, Antonia Whitburn by name, having just lost her father, and being left penniless, came from Australia to England, to live at Aldersfield House, the home of Sir Evas and Lady Dove. Sir Evas, a kind, good-natured man, had insisted on taking his half-niece to live with him and his wife, and Lady Dove had grudgingly given her consent, but he was not allowed to forget that he had thwarted her, for she visited her displeasure both on him and on Antonia, called "Toney" by every one except Lady Dove. Miss Anne Crump, the companion, had been crushed by long years in Lady Dove's service, and she expected that Antonia Whitburn would also soon succumb under the same discipline.

But Toney Whitburn was, as Lady Dove expressed it, "not a girl, but a whirlwind." She

was as irrepressible as an india-rubber ball, and always rebounded, refusing to have her high spirits depressed by this selfish woman, who instead of being a mother to her tried to be a tyrant.

The trial of strength between them belongs to another story, but the penniless orphan had high principles as well as high spirits. To help all in trouble, and to share her few pennies with others, was her guiding principle, imbibed from a hero father. To her the oppressed Miss Crump, whom she called her Chum, was as important as the grand county ladies she met at Aldersfield, and she at last succeeded in bringing sunshine into the poor slave's life.

Then one day a certain General Stone, a connection of the Doves, coming to visit at Aldersfield House, discovered that the penniless orphan possessed one of those rare natures which can unite a keen discernment of worldly motives with a perfectly unselfish and single-minded character. In his long life the old General had found few to love him for himself, and not, as did Lady Dove, for the possible chance of inheriting his money, so he secretly made his will and left all his fortune to Toney Whitburn.

Two other men had seen the gold through Toney's untamed nature; one was the neighbouring young squire, Lewis Waycott, who gave a home to his aunts, Miss Honoria Waycott and Mrs. Hamilton,

and her two daughters in his beautiful Elizabethan house, Waycott Hall, bordering on the Aldersfield estate. To him Toney Whitburn appeared like a new creation, and he honestly fell in love with the girl and determined that some day he would ask her to be his wife, in spite of the many disparaging remarks he heard about her from those who surrounded him. The other was Mr. Hales, the clergyman, who lived with his mother and sister Sylvia at the Vicarage, and suffered many insults at the hands of the arrogant Lady Dove. He is asked by her to finish Toney's education, and willingly undertakes the task till she becomes rich and is then sent abroad to "finish," for suddenly General Stone dies, and Toney Whitburn becomes the heiress of his large fortune. But from the first she alone recognizes that this fortune is not given entirely for her own happiness, but for the sake of the poor and needy, whose champion she had always been. Her riches make no difference to her sterling character, and during her minority she makes plans for the building of a large and delightful home, dedicated to needy gentlefolk, and to be called Stone House. Her coming of age is celebrated with lavish magnificence for the benefit of the poor village folks, and she is intensely happy in making plans for the happiness of everybody around her. Sir Evas has to choose a secretary for her, and a certain Plantagenet Russell arrives,

immediately nicknamed "His Royal Highness," and he, meaning to have an easy life, finds himself worked exceedingly hard by the young heiress, for she intends to sink a large portion of her wealth in order to realize her dream of Stone House. The secretary's conversion is slow but sure, for few could resist the strong impetus towards good which influenced Toney, and which she, whether they would or not, passed on to others.

Lewis Waycott, seeing how Toney's money attracts fortune-hunters, determines not to be one of them, and for a time retires from the field. How his objections were got over, and how Stone House was built and endowed, also belong to yet another story.

Through Toney's exertions the Squire's two cousins, Jeanie and Maud Hamilton, are provided with husbands. Jeanie is at last married to Frank Weston, a celebrated violinist, jilted in his youth by her because of his plebeian birth; but the two really love each other, and are brought together again by Toney's secret plans; whilst her sister, Maud, accepts the Honourable Edward Lang, who had proposed to Toney for her money, but who had seen the error of his ways by her straightforward rejection, and had then honestly fallen in love with the penniless Maud.

Lewis Waycott's faithful love is at last rewarded, and Toney Whitburn becomes Mrs. Waycott of

Waycott Hall. The poor companion, Anne Crump, through Toney's machinations, marries Mr. Faber, an old love, who had come back from missionary work, and they are Toney's constant visitors, much to Lady Dove's displeasure, who, uninfluenced and always jealous of the heiress, is still a selfish, exacting old woman. Mr. Hales, after his mother's death, still lives at the Vicarage with his sister Sylvia ; and she, having been jilted for a rich widow by Captain Kemp, a penniless officer, has drifted into a discontented wallflower. Sir Evas remains the same kind-hearted, dependable man, still bullied by and still much in fear of his wife's tongue, but now able to forget his worries in the doings and interests of his married niece and her twins ; and she, as always, tries to bring sunshine to him and to all around her, especially to the dwellers of Stone House, the living memorials of General Stone.

The following story of "Two Troubadours" needs no further explanation, except to say that they are Toney's twins, and that she is trying to bring them up with the same ideals which her father had so effectually instilled into her youthful mind.

ESMÈ STUART.

CHAPTER I.

TWO COUNTRY GENTLEMEN.

One spring morning Punch and Judy, two ponies, thoroughbred, and almost exactly alike, came trotting up to Aldersfield House, and on them rode two twin boys, so exactly alike that "which was which" was a favourite subject of conversation among their friends and relations. They were followed by a big Newfoundland dog, who answered to the name of Pasha Jones. Very manly little fellows they looked, with short hair, blue eyes, and eager faces.

To-day they fully realized that they had been allowed for the first time to come alone from Waycott Hall, their home, to Aldersfield House, their great-uncle's house. They had come by the gap in the boundary hedge, which had to be jumped, but they were expert riders, and feared nothing. They were going to visit their "Gan-Aunt Dove on their own," and they could not have felt more important had they been twin Governor-Generals of India going to visit a dependency.

A groom came running from the stables in time to see them swing themselves off in the correct style. They were breathless but exceedingly happy, and appreciated to the full the dignity of their position.

"Please, Joseph, take round Punch and Judy to the stables; and they mustn't get cold, you know; and we're going to call on Gan-Aunt Dove. Lie down, Pasha Jones, and wait for us."

"She isn't Joseph's Gan-Aunt Dove, Louis," whispered Francis; then aloud he made the correction:

"We're going to call on Lady Dove, Joseph."

Joseph touched his cap, grinned from ear to ear, and said:

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think she is at home?" asked Louis.

"We say that at the front door," again whispered Francis; and Louis, recognizing his terrible mistake, coughed a little and added, to cover his former error, as Joseph took hold of the ponies' bridles:

"Is *your* wife at home, Joseph?"

Joseph was not married, but he did not wish to hurt the young gentleman's feelings, so he merely touched his cap again, and said:

"No, sir."

Then the boys climbed up the steps leading to the front door. In reality they were a very short distance from the earth, but they themselves felt very big and important.

Louis rang the bell. He had to stand on tip-toe, but Francis considerately looked away so as not to see this. He knew Louis would prefer this effort on his part to pass unnoticed. Then both stood to attention, as if they were going to say their catechism to their mother on Sunday. A grave, elderly butler opened the door and looked down on the diminutive visitors.

Louis looked up at him very sedately.

"Is Gan-Aunt Dove at home, Mills?"

Frances pulled his brother's coat sleeve.

"Is Lady Dove at home?" he added, and Louis coughed.

Mr. Mills, for the life of him, could not keep his usual solemnity of countenance; he actually smiled as he answered:

"Her ladyship is at home, sir."

"Then will you please say two country gentlemen have come to call on her."

Mr. Mills fairly turned his back, as he murmured:

"Yes, sir."

The two country gentlemen walked very demurely behind him, though now and then they had to trot a few steps to leave the correct distance between them and the butler.

Mills opened the door and announced:

"Two country gentlemen to see her ladyship."

Lady Dove was elderly and had a disagreeable

expression on her countenance; moreover, she was less brisk than of old. She had never recovered from what she had gone through during a fire at Aldersfield House, but being proud, she too, like the twins, tried to keep up appearances, and did not wish anyone to notice that she walked somewhat feebly, and was too much under the dominion of Miss Crossman, her companion.

"Two country gentlemen! Good gracious!" Lady Dove had looked high up, but her eyes had to descend quickly to a lower level, and then even *she* smiled. The male sex had always received more consideration from her than the other, and curiously enough she was very partial to Louis, the elder brother.

The twins walked demurely up to her. Their caps were off and their attitude was most correct. Louis spoke first; he never forgot he was the elder.

"Good morning, Gan-Aunt Dove. We've come to see you."

"To call on you," corrected Francis.

"Because now we're country gentlemen, so we go alone—sometimes."

"Except out hunting," said Francis, "and then we are going to take our groom."

"Indeed? Well, I call it tempting Providence to let you two children go out alone; your mother should know better."

"Mumsey wants us to be manly," said Louis with dignity.

"Pupsey says we must learn to look after ourselves," added Francis.

"And then I expect they both spoil you frightfully," answered Lady Dove.

"How do you do, Miss Crossman?" said Francis, turning to the companion, a bad-tempered, severe-looking person, and making her an old-fashioned bow.

"I haven't forgotten you, Miss Crossman," said Louis, "but I had to answer Gan-Aunt Dove first."

Miss Crossman gave a nod to each of the boys. She was not at all partial to children.

"Gan-Aunt Dove, did you hear Mr. Mills call us 'Country Gentlemen?' We have just become that, and it's awfully interesting."

"Country gentlemen indeed!" said Lady Dove.

"Yes, it's a society; you have to join it, you know."

"We made it," said Francis, "out of our heads. We're going to put down the names of the members just like Pupsey puts down the names of his tenants. It's just for men only, Gan-Aunt Dove, or we'd ask you to join."

"What's this new nonsense?" said Lady Dove with a sniff.

"It isn't nonsense, it's very serious, you know, when you join it! There's so many things you

have to promise. You mustn't steal, or tell lies, or hurt anything, and you've got to obey the King and all the Royal Family."

"The Royal Family isn't what it was in my young days," said Lady Dove; "please, Miss Crossman, give that note to Louis, it's for his father."

"I'm sure I don't know which is which, Lady Dove," said the companion tartly, looking at the twins.

"I'm the eldest," said Louis: "not much older because we're twins, but Mumsey says the eldest has great responsibilities. Francis can't help being the youngest, but Pupsey says he's got to learn to give up to me. It's rather horrid for him, isn't it? But he doesn't mind; you see he's called after a great friend of mother's, who was always giving up."

"What great friend?" said Lady Dove, looking at the boy without taking much heed to his words.

"It's Francis of Assisi. I'm not sure if he's alive still; he was anyhow not very long ago, and she called him Francis after him."

"Nothing will ever teach Antonia any sense," said Lady Dove in her severe voice. "You will have to make yourselves country gentlemen, my poor boys; I'm sure your parents won't teach you how to take your proper place in the country now or in the future."

"That's what Mumsey says," answered Francis

gravely, "we've got to do it ourselves, and to think it all out, even if the things are very tiresome."

"Pupsey says I shall get tired sooner than Francis. Do you think I shall, Gan-Aunt Dove?"

"I think you have more spirit than your brother, and I hope more sense than your mother. Miss Crossman, the children had better have a glass of milk. Ring the bell, please."

"Do you mind not calling us children, Gan-Aunt Dove?" said Louis, looking sadly at Lady Dove; "country gentlemen are never called children, are they?"

"Mumsey says we've got to put away childish things now we are country gentlemen," added Francis.

At this moment the door was opened and a big Newfoundland dog entered, followed by Sir Evas Dove, the owner of Aldersfield House.

"Evas! How could you let in that horrid creature?" asked his wife.

But Francis, getting off his chair, ran to his friend and seized his collar.

"Oh, you know you mustn't come in here, Pasha Jones! You know Gan-Aunt Dove doesn't like big dogs. Good morning, Gan-Uncle Evas, have you been round the farms?—because Mumsey said we might ride back with you if you were going anywhere."

Louis ran too to meet Sir Evas. One knew at

a glance that the boys anyhow were certain of this relation's good-will.

"Bless my soul! What new garments have you donned, boys? Eh?"

"It's because we're country gentlemen now," said Louis, looking proudly at his new suit. His brother had disappeared, dragging Pasha Jones with him. "We want you to be one too, Uncle Evas."

"I'm afraid I've been one too long already."

"But do join *our* society, Uncle. Mumsey says you're awfully good to everybody, and that you haven't ever hurt anything, not even Gan-Aunt Dove."

"Ahem!" said Sir Evas, trying to drown these last words in a cough.

"And you mustn't steal or tell lies. Do you ever tell lies, Gan-Uncle?"

"My dear Louis, you'll find when you are older all men are liars," said Lady Dove, smiling cheerfully. "I fear your society won't do much reforming in *that* line anyhow."

"I do hope you will join though, Gan-Uncle, and if you have told fibs sometimes you can't again, because after three black ones you would be turned out."

"Who's to find me out?" added Sir Evas, hiding a smile.

"Pupsey says your conscience will find you out,

but Mumsey says conscience is sometimes awfully tough. I hope yours isn't, Gan-Uncle ? "

Francis returned now without Pasha Jones.

" Will he join ? " he asked anxiously.

" Yes," said his brother, " I think so, only he does fib sometimes, I'm afraid. Now we must go. Gan-Aunt, good-bye. We're very glad to have seen you, and we hope you're well, and good-bye, Uncle Evas and Miss Crossman."

When the brothers came solemnly down the steps of Aldersfield House they looked critically at their ponies, just as they had seen their father look at his steed. Joseph had still a smile on his broad, good-natured face.

" We are not going straight home through the gap in the Park, Joseph," said Louis, " but we're going down the drive, and then down the road to Stone House, where our special friends live."

" Yes, sir," said Joseph, " shall I come with you ? "

" Oh, dear, no, Joseph, we are trusted out alone to-day because we are country gentlemen now."

Joseph touched his hat and said, " Yes, sir."

" We want you to join too, Joseph," said Francis earnestly. " Will you be a country gentleman ? I've got a list here," and he pulled out a notebook from his pocket, and a large pencil. " It's our new society, and it won't be very difficult," he added encouragingly.

Joseph felt a little confounded; he had never hoped to become a country gentleman under any circumstances.

"I can't be a country gentleman, sir, I have to work for my living."

"Oh, you don't understand," said Louis, "you can be, it's quite easy. You've only just to sign your name and promise some things."

"Or put your mark if you can't write," added Francis considerately.

"Yes, and promise not to hurt anybody weaker than yourself, especially animals. You mustn't throw a brickbat after a cat, nor kick a dog, and you mustn't hurt a woman, of course, and obey all the Royal Family. That's all, isn't it, Francis?"

"You mustn't use any bad words either, so you see, Joseph, you *can* be a country gentleman. Put your name here."

Joseph knew he was wanted in the stable, so he hastily scrawled his name on the paper, and the boys looked at his caligraphy with great admiration.

"You're the second, Joseph—our Jim at home was the first. There's nothing to pay unless you break rules, and then you pay a fine."

"It's a penny for a bad word, Joseph, twopence if it's *very* bad, and we haven't settled the price of the other things. It is a very big fine for kicking

a dog, Mumsey says. I don't think anyone could kick Pasha Jones, could they ? "

Joseph was already repenting having joined the new society ; he foresaw a great loss of income, or a very seared conscience.

" Good-bye, Brother Joseph, you become a brother when you've joined our society. I think we can get some more members at Stone House. Come on, Pasha Jones." Stone House was a beautiful home for decayed gentlefolk, built and endowed by the mother of the twins.

They now urged on the ponies, and off they galloped, looking so strong and happy, and making such perfect pictures that, had the park contained any onlookers, they must have turned to watch the pair riding past.

" We've got two," said Louis, when they reached the gate opening on to the road and he had to get down to open it. " It's just lovely ! "

" Scrummy," added Francis. " Do you think Mr. Russell will join when he sees that Jim and Joseph have ? "

" 'Spect so."

" There's Miss Sylvia ! " exclaimed Louis, as a tall, pretty lady came out of a cottage. They touched their caps with a great air to the Vicar's sister, Miss Sylvia Hales.

" How do you do, Miss Sylvia ? " exclaimed Francis, " we're out alone to-day."

"So I see. I wonder you are trusted alone!"

"Do you? Mumsey said we might go alone to see Gan-Aunt Dove, and then to Stone House. We did so want to get new members for our society."

"What society?" said Sylvia. No one could resist speaking to the twins and entering into their interests.

"It's only for men," said Louis, "so it won't be of any use for you, Miss Sylvia; but when you get married, then your husband can join."

Sylvia blushed, even though her interlocutor was only a seven-year-old boy; she could not help thinking regretfully of Captain Kemp, who had jilted her.

"I'm not married."

"Don't you wish you were; why don't you get some one to marry you?"

"It's not the custom!" laughed Sylvia Hales, in spite of herself.

"Francis and I are going to marry two twin sisters so that we can all match, and they are to be just alike, so it won't matter if we don't know them apart."

"Come on, Louis, we shall be late, we've only got one hour more before Mr. Russell's lessons. Our tutor is very particular, we have to keep a book of punctuality."

"Good-bye, Miss Sylvia; don't forget about

your husband joining our society when you get one."

The ponies trotted on along the road, and the boys were so blissfully happy that they could not talk till they drew up at the gates of Stone House.

This was a large stone building with mullioned windows and fascinating lawns and gardens, and everything about it looked cheerful and lovely.

"Let's go to the Reverend Mr. Smith, first, Francis."

"You don't call him Reverend, Louis, talking about him; he's just Mr. Smith.

"Dr. Harris' house comes first, you call him Doctor, I know. Captain Grant is so deaf it takes a long time spelling things out on our fingers, doesn't it?"

"Mrs. Phipps might help us perhaps, or Miss Phipps."

"They might be jealous because ladies can't join."

"There's Mr. Thomas, he'll take our ponies, won't he?"

Mr. Thomas, the factotum of Stone House, was close by, looking after a new rose garden, and he hurried up at the sight of the twins Every one on the estate felt a personal possession in the Waycott twins.

"All alone, sirs?"

"Yes, it's the first time, Mr. Thomas, that

Mumsey's trusted us, because we're now country gentlemen. We want you and all the gentlemen here to belong to our new society."

"Bless my soul!" was Mr. Thomas' answer.

There were gabled porches along the front of Stone House, and on each front door was affixed a brass plate with a name. Dr. and Mrs. Harris' house was the first, and the twins now knocked at their door. Mrs. Harris answered the knock and looked down with a kind smile on her small visitors.

"Is Dr. Harris at home, if you please?" said Louis.

"Come in, my dears; yes, the doctor is at home, but he's very rheumatic to-day. You must not mind his groaning."

She led the way into a sweet little sitting-room with a south window, through which the sun poured in generously.

"How do?" said Louis, going up to a crippled old gentleman in a big arm-chair.

"How do, Dr. Harris?" echoed Francis, and both boys stood to attention.

"Do? why I'm infernally bad to-day," answered Dr. Harris.

"We are very sorry, Dr. Harris, but we've come to ask you to join our new society; you would like to, wouldn't you? Mumsey doesn't know we've come to ask you, because she's a woman, and it's only for men."

"New society!" exclaimed Dr. Harris. "Good Lord, give me new legs!"

Francis looked thoughtful as he enumerated the must-nots of their society.

"Well, well, how strange. I'm sure, George, if you joined you would lose a considerable number of pennies," said Mrs. Harris, smiling.

"And lose my temper too. No, no, no societies for me."

The twins looked sadly at each other.

"You will be *very* sorry to be out of it," said Francis, "some day."

"Joseph and our Jim's joined," said Louis, "but we must go on now. We're going to ask Captain Grant. Good-bye, Mrs. Harris; sorry ladies can't join."

The twins went on to Captain Grant's house, and, having obtained admission, began a laboured conversation on their fingers; but as Captain Grant found it easier to say "Yes" to everything, and to sign his name where he was bidden without understanding the penalties he was incurring, the twins soon joyfully turned their faces homeward, having without much difficulty obtained another member for the "Country Gentlemen Society."

"Good-bye," they said, smiling and nodding. "Good-bye, dear Brother Grant."

CHAPTER II.

NEW MEMBERS.

MR. AND MRS. WAYCOTT were standing together on the steps of Waycott Hall, looking eagerly down the drive towards the village. The beautiful Elizabethan house made a worthy setting to the pair, and if happiness can be painted on faces then it certainly was something more than happiness: there was gentleness and firmness, character and high purpose.

Moreover, in the husband's attitude towards the wife there was a charming deference, and a never-failing courtesy, very seldom practised by those who have been married several years.

"Look again, Toney, do you see them? Wasn't it rash of you to trust them, for your sons are not immaculate!"

"The darlings! of course not, but they must learn to be independent. Do what we will, everybody spoils them except——"

"Their father!"

"Oh, no, their mother!" Toney Waycott slipped her hand into her husband's arm and added, laughing, "Do you know, Lewis, I do believe even Aunt Dove has a weakness for Louis. She said the other day it was wonderful that he was such a little gentleman; and she looked hard at me!"

"It's wonderful how now and then she hits the nail on the head! Don't you see them now, dearest? your eyes are so good."

"I wish I could! Do you know that Mr. Russell is worth his weight in gold. He's the only person in the house whose decrees they never question. How does he manage it?"

Lewis Waycott laughed too.

"It's lucky there is *one* person who is firm with them."

"Oh, Lewis, I do try to be firm! Our lives seem so blessed, so full of brightness that sometimes I am afraid. Look! there's something."

"I hope you won't try this experiment often; Jim could have been spared this morning." Jim was the coachman, but also a devoted friend who had saved Mrs. Waycott's life during the fire at Aldersfield House.

"There, you see how little you back me up! No, it's not the twins, it is dear Uncle Evas."

Sir Evas Dove came trotting up on a big hunter. Every day he came to Waycott Hall on some pretence or other, because he knew Toney's time

was more precious than his own. Lewis ran down to greet him, and rang the stable bell, when Jim appeared to take his horse round.

"That means lunch, Uncle Evas, doesn't it?" asked Toney, giving her old uncle a hug.

"No, oh, no, Toney! I told Melina I shouldn't want any; I'm going on to Swan's Farm, where some new buildings have to be inspected, so I said——"

"Oh, fie! Uncle Evas, you told a little fib! I never remember your jibbing at food before if it's in sight!"

"Did you see the twins?" asked Lewis Waycott, with a shade of anxiety in his voice.

"Twins!" Sir Evas burst out laughing. "I should think I did; their mother's own sons wanted me to become a member of a society for country gentlemen; they said it was their own invention!"

"You didn't laugh at them, did you, Uncle Evas? It's awfully real to them. It really was all their very own idea after Lewis had explained to them his ideas of a country gentleman!"

"I saw them trotting off to Stone House. How many converts will they find there? But, honour bright, Toney, I also came on business. Look here, young people, how do the finances get on?"

"Toney runs short and then steals my cheques!" said Lewis, with a beaming face.

"Enough to make you get a separation, eh?

There's your precious lawyer's been writing to me; he's so mortally afraid of you, Toney, ever since the time when you insisted on endowing Stone House with more than half your fortune."

"What's the matter with the dear old parchment? There's the luncheon bell! Come along, Uncle Evas, and feed the inner man first if it's very bad news you're bringing!"

Lewis Waycott still stood on the hall steps watching for the arrival of his sons. Toney's ideas were all right, of course, but he felt that they were mites to go about alone. Suppose something had happened to them; but he was ashamed to show his fears whilst their mother refused to be anxious.

Sir Evas followed Toney to the dining-room, where Mr. Russell—friend, secretary, and tutor—was waiting by the fire warming his coat-tails; and in another moment Miss Honoria Waycott, the Squire's aunt, who had brought him up after he had lost both parents in a railway accident, arrived. She was now on one of her long visits to her nephew, and never felt herself in the way.

"I told you, Miss Waycott, those boys would not be in time!" said Mr. Russell, trying to look stern.

"You really should not trust such young things, Toney," added Miss Honoria, who had passed on some of her great affection for her nephew to the twins.

"Discipline!" murmured Mr. Russell. "I showed them their time-table before starting."

"Bless you!" said Sir Evas, "they're all right, game for anything! They're the pluckiest little fellows I've ever known.

"Only too clever," said Miss Honoria. "Do you know, Sir Evas, that it's quite appalling what they pick up and learn."

"And repeat," said Mr. Russell.

Toney looked crestfallen, but as her sons were being accused she felt she must defend them.

"They can't help being sharp, Uncle Evas, now, can they? And Mr. Russell will tell you they are none *too* good; but one thing puzzles me: I can't imagine why Francis should be so mad on music. I never knew one note from another, so it isn't from *me* he gets that."

"Francis has certainly great musical capacity, but that may wear off," said Mr. Russell, as one who seeks to comfort a depressed mother; "but they both have an extraordinary leaning for books, and almost too good a memory. They forget nothing. Latin seems no difficulty to them, and they are making out French by themselves; they teach each other."

"Burn all the books, Russell, that's my advice; but anyhow you can't say they are nincompoops. For my part, I don't see anything the matter with

them," Sir Evas said decidedly, and Mrs. Waycott added:

"Don't you see, Aunt Honoria, how imperative it is that they should be manly and independent when every one will spoil them? Uncle Evas is shocking. The other day——"

But that bad deed was not told, for a noise of feet was heard and Lewis Waycott entered, followed by his sons.

There was a chorus of "Why are you late?" "Where have you been?" etc.

The twins, however, walked very sedately like two little men straight to their tutor and stood to attention, and Louis spoke:

"We're awfully sorry, Mr. Russell, for being late, but we didn't look at the clock because we thought we'd better not."

"Why didn't you?" asked Mr. Russell sternly.

"'Cos we didn't want to know the time," said Francis. "I thought of that, and we were so very busy getting new members for our society."

"Next time," said Mr. Russell, hiding a smile with his hand, "you *must* look at the clock. Now apologize to your mother."

"You did laugh though, Mr. Russell," said Francis, "so you cannot be very angry, but the clock at Stone House is so big, it's awfully difficult not to look at it, isn't it, Louis?"

"Awfully," said Louis. "I nearly did see it,

but it was only one hand, and that doesn't tell you the *exact* time, does it ? "

" Mumsey, we're awfully sorry to be late," said Francis ; " we apologize ever so much, don't we Louis ? But you *did* say we were to be trusted out alone, so we trusted ourselves to see Captain Grant and Mr. Harris. If you want to hear about it you'll tell us, 'cause, you know, we mustn't speak at lunch unless we're spoken to, and we're awfully hungry."

Louis climbed on to his chair by his father, and Francis by his mother. It had been found safer to separate them at lunch time. Toney was also hiding her smiles, but incorrigible Uncle Evas was laughing aloud.

" So you stayed a little to see your Aunt Dove ? " he said, looking at Louis' boyish face and large blue eyes.

" That's a question, isn't it ? We had a little conversation with her, and she said, Mumsey, that our parents wouldn't ever teach us to take our proper places in the country."

" Ahem ! " said Sir Evas, " you shouldn't repeat all that ladies say."

" Is that because we're not grown up, Gan-Uncle Evas ? I suppose you repeat all Gan-Aunt Dove says, don't you ? We always do repeat what Mumsey says, don't we, Francis ? Is that wrong because she is a lady."

" We don't repeat her scoldings, Louis, so I

suppose Uncle Evas leaves out Gan-Aunt's scoldings. Don't you, Uncle Evas?"

There was a smile all around the table, but Sir Evas was not a coward outside his own home.

"I think them over, that's better, isn't it, Louis?"

"Mumsey says we must forget it if we hear anything that isn't nice, and a scolding isn't nice, is it Uncle Evas? We know you get them, because I heard Miss Crossman say——"

Here Mr. Waycott threw himself into the breach.

"No one asked you what Miss Crossman said, Louis, so that is not permissible."

There was nothing more to say when their father spoke decidedly, so the twins were silent and attended to their dinner with some audible sighs and a few groans.

"What's that sigh for, Francis?" said Miss Honoria.

"I've got such a lot of words inside me that want to come out, Aunt Honoria, and if I sigh it sort of relieves me."

"By the way, Toney, I've come to tell you our poor cousin's dead—Arthur Dove, you know, our only male relative on the Dove side. Very sad, and so unexpected."

The elders looked at each other, but Sir Evas saved them the trouble of expressing their thoughts.

"Yes, he was the heir of Aldersfield. I shall

have to make a new will. It will please the lawyers."

Louis cocked up his ears, and more words were smothered in a deep sigh.

"Well, what's that for, Louis?" asked Sir Evas.

"Thank you, Gan-Uncle Evas, for asking me. It's about your will. Mumsey says we have to make a new will when we're young because we shan't be able to alter it when we're old. I think you must be too old to make one now."

"Never too old to mend, my boy. By the way, Russell, Lady Dove wants you to come and see her soon. She says she wants to repaper the drawing-room, and requires your advice; she has a great belief in you, Russell—thinks nothing of *my* taste."

"Well, you dear uncle, it's rather true; if it wasn't for Aunt Dove's consultations with Mr. Russell you would be living in the most hideous house imaginable," laughed Toney; whenever she could she liked to take her aunt's side, as it always pleased her uncle.

"What nonsense, eh, Louis?"

"Yes, Uncle Evas. Do you know that Aunt Dove said our new society was nonsense, but it isn't. We are so sorry you won't join it."

"Bless my soul! What did Dr. Harris say when you asked *him*?"

"He said he was infernally bad to-day—that's a bad word, isn't it, Uncle Evas?—so we didn't

press him much," remarked Louis, and Francis added :

" He often says words like that, so I think he would lose a lot of money if he joined ; but Mr. Grant has joined. He wrote his name in our book, and your Joseph joined too, Uncle Evas. Do you think he ever says a bad word ? "

" Of course he does. The stable people aren't very choice in their language."

" Oh, no, not *all*, Uncle Evas. Our Jim never does—Lewis cured him," said Toney.

" How did you do it, Waycott ? There's a wide field for you in our stable-yard."

A deep sigh from Francis was audible, and he looked so appealingly into his mother's eyes that she gave in.

" Well, what do you want to say, sonny ? "

" Gan-Uncle Evas isn't *very* truthful himself ; that's why he wouldn't join our society, I 'spect. There can't be a wide field in a stable ! "

" Yes, there can ; ask Mr. Russell to explain that to you after lunch, it's too much for me. Now off with you both to the schoolroom."

After lunch the grown-ups gathered in the pretty drawing-room. Miss Honoria went to her own special arm-chair, always held sacred by Toney, for had not she been a mother to Lewis, and so good to Lewis' harum-scarum wife ?

Coffee was brought in, and Mr. and Mrs. Waycott,

Sir Evas, Miss Honoria, and Mr. Russell sat in the sunny room, full of flowers and sunshine. Wherever Toney was there was sunshine and there were flowers. Presently Sir Evas took Mrs. Waycott aside.

"It's business I want to speak about," said Sir Evas. "Of course now Aldersfield has no heir; when I leave the stage——"

"You mustn't ever leave it, Uncle Evas," said Toney, "you're my prop—Lewis doesn't count, you know, because he won't contradict me, and you always do."

"Well, but I want to know . . . of course small Louis will have Waycott, and I want Francis to have Aldersfield. You . . . spend too much to save for him."

Evidently none of them had thought of such a settlement of affairs.

"Oh, Uncle Evas!" exclaimed Toney. "My son Francis is vowed to poverty; that's why I called him Francis."

Miss Honoria laughed.

"I suppose somebody must have property, Toney?"

"Oh, yes, Louis must, and we mean to bring him up in that state of life. He's awfully generous, so I don't think it will hurt him; but Francis . . . I did want to try the experiment of a beggarly younger son, Uncle Evas!"

"What does Lady Dove say?" asked Lewis Waycott. He wanted to find out if Sir Evas had broached the subject to his spouse.

"Well, unfortunately, she said of her own accord 'I should like Louis to have it, and make one big property of it.'"

"Oh!" groaned Toney, "more property! I assure you, Uncle Evas, Lewis already works himself to death over Waycott, doesn't he, Aunt Honoria?"

"He does work too hard," said his aunt, looking affectionately at her nephew.

"Nonsense; why Toney isn't yet satisfied," he said looking up, laughing, "she wants me to go into Parliament as well."

"He should, shouldn't he, Uncle? His country must have his work as well as his wife and his two sons."

"Very good thing if he would, but . . . I say, Toney, you'd have to live rather differently if the county was on your shoulders."

"That's just why I want him to try, Uncle. I'm so happy, and we do live such a jolly life, that I'm afraid——"

"Afraid of what, Toney? First time I've heard you say you're afraid!"

"I'm afraid . . . of too much happiness."

"What an idea!" said Aunt Honoria. "Toney is always slaving for other people."

"Slaving, as you call it, is what I love! How I should hate being a grand lady of importance, but I fear it is really more than we can afford."

"By the way, Toney, do you remember that land at Hulford I bought for you?"

"Yes, Uncle, I've had several offers for it."

"Have you? If you want to sell it, give me first offer, eh?"

"Of course, I give it to you out and out now, dear old Uncle."

"Humph, no, no, I'll buy it; nice bit of land, wants developing. Now that Lewis does everything I've nothing to do; in fact, I'm so idle that I think the old gentleman will come my way."

"You must become a 'country gentleman,' Sir Evas," said Miss Honoria, smiling; "your great nephews will welcome your conversion."

The coffee was finished, and the party prepared to break up. Toney said she must go to Stone House to see what mischief her sons had done, and Lewis had business on the estate. He went out with Sir Evas.

"You don't mean that about Aldersfield, do you?" the Squire said sadly.

"Indeed I do, some one must have it, and I think Toney will bring up her sons in the right way; but Melina is smitten with the idea of making it all one property; however, we can wait a little."

This meant Sir Evas *had* to wait. Suddenly

there was a great shouting and rushing, and a big Newfoundland dog dashed up the steps, whilst Louis and Francis dashed down, calling on Pasha Jones to be quiet. Mr. Russell followed them.

"Could you ever have believed 'His Royal Highness' would be so devoted to children?" exclaimed Toney, also running down the steps. "Well, it's true, he's abjectly devoted to them; and he's such a good man. You did choose well when you made him my secretary, Uncle Evas, you always do!"

CHAPTER III.

THE PRICE OF LIES.

Mr. Plantagenet Russell, *alias* "His Royal Highness," had learnt a great deal of wisdom since his arrival at Aldersfield House in his capacity of secretary to the young heiress. He still retained his post when she migrated to Waycott, and he was assigned two pleasant rooms in the Squire's house Mr. Russell's work had steadily increased, but he had never complained. When the twins were born he had been much perturbed, for never before had he come in contact with children, and he thought of them as necessary evils, but he reckoned without these twins. At a very early age they displayed an extraordinary reverence for Mr. Planty Russell, as they called him. Most likely it was because he never sought their admiration, and never condescended to flatter them. Planty's word was law to them, much to the amusement of Toney and her husband. As the twins grew in stature and in wits, it was decided that

something must be done for their education, for they were fast educating themselves. As Lady Dove said: "It was a great misfortune for Antonia to have such clever infants."

The misfortune was there, however, and what was to be done? Mr. Russell suddenly settled the question. One morning at breakfast he said: "I think, Mrs. Waycott, your letters are really diminishing. Now that Stone House is built and occupied, I have a little more time on my hands."

"And you have done such splendid work, Mr. Russell, and kept me tabulated!" They could laugh at each other now without fear of offence. "I'm very glad you will have a little more time to play."

"I was not dreaming of play, but . . . I think, if you don't mind, I had better turn into a tutor to fill up my spare time. The boys must have some one."

"They must indeed!" laughed Mr. Waycott, "but, my dear Russell, have you counted the cost? Your life won't be worth living."

"Oh, it's a lovely idea," exclaimed Toney. "I don't seem to be quite equal to my sons' education! When we begin they go running off into sidewalks and never return. It's humiliating to acknowledge it, but these two small imps have beaten me."

"You spoil them," said her husband, laughing.

"No, it's you, Lewis; you give in to them."

"I *think* I can manage them," said Mr. Russell, smiling in rather a superior manner.

"I'm awfully grateful," exclaimed Toney. "I was dreading having a starched governess or a strange tutor; your offer takes a load off my mind! Money can't repay you, Mr. Russell, but of course we'll reward you."

Mr. Russell laughed.

"I've got too much money already! Besides, I may fail!" This last remark was only mock humility on Mr. Plantagenet's part.

"What could we expect of Toney's sons," laughed her husband. "Her punishment has come at last for leading us such a wild life all these years."

"Then you will be their tutor till you get married."

Mr. Russell laughed.

"I'm a confirmed bachelor, Mrs. Waycott; even *you* never managed a romance for me!"

Two years had gone by and Mr. Russell was still tutor to Toney's twins, but he did not now boast openly of success! He had failed often in a most humiliating way. It was impossible to be always even with those twins; still, on the whole, the plan worked well, and the worst of it was when sternness had to be resorted to it was Plantagenet Russell who suffered the most, for he had fallen under the spell, though without being able openly to acknowledge it.

"Planty Russell," said Louis, when Pasha Jones had been disentangled from their legs.

"Oh," exclaimed Francis, "mother said we was to call him Mr. Russell!"

"So we will before other people, but when we're quite alone we may be chums, mayn't we, and call you Planty?" said Louis, coaxingly.

Here was a new pitfall for poor Mr. Russell. How could you say "No" to such a request? The four blue eyes looked up at his face with a beseeching look.

"Ahem, I scarcely know." He wanted to gain time.

"We're awful afraid of you in lesson time," added Francis, "but when we all go for a walk like this, with Pasha Jones and our three selves, we aren't a bit afraid! It is odd, isn't it, Mr. Russell—Planty?"

Mr. Russell had a sudden excess of sneezing, or a good imitation of it, which necessitated covering his face with a large handkerchief.

"He's thinking," said Louis, in a stage whisper to his brother.

Francis nodded.

"Mr. Russell, or Planty, have you done thinking? I don't think yours is real sneezes."

The big handkerchief had to return to Mr. Russell's pocket.

"These spring days incline one to—to sneezing."

he said. "Don't you think, Louis, it's a serious question? I should not like other people to hear you call me Planty; it doesn't sound respectful."

"But when just we three only heard it, we'd know it was just a short, respectful name."

"Well, under those conditions. . . ."

Louis thrust his minute hand into his tutor's large palm, and Francis did the same on the other side.

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Planty! It's a beautiful name, and of course you're descended from the early English kings, aren't you? Louis said so the other day."

This was another pitfall and a tender point.

"Not quite exactly, Louis."

"But you might have been if your mother had married a king?"

This was a perfect solution, and Mr. Russell accepted it and turned the conversation.

"Do you know your godmother and godfather, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Weston, are coming here next week, Francis? You must behave very well, and show them how you have got on with your music."

"If he had been my godfather I'd have been musical too, I expect," said Louis, "but I'm not one bit; I take after Mumsey—she's an awful duffer at music, Francis says."

"People have different gifts," murmured Mr. Russell, clearing his throat.

"When we three chums are alone, Planty, you mustn't begin any moral, must you? We get a good many—some from mother, we think them nice, and some from father, only he never finishes them; and Gan-Aunt Dove's morals aren't very nice. She begins with 'Now, children,' but since we founded our society we aren't children any more."

"You'll remember that, Planty, won't you?"

"Certainly, if you don't remind me that you are children."

"We want you to join our society, perticlarly, because it will be an honour for you."

"Oh, indeed!"

"But, of course, Planty, we find people don't much like the part about paying for fibs. There's a white lie, and a black lie, and a brown lie, and a blue lie."

"Good heavens! how is one to know them apart?"

"A white lie is when you want a little 'scuse; a black lie is when you are real bad; a brown lie is when it's half-and-half."

"And, pray, what is a blue fib?"

"That's when you tell a lie to save a friend. Mumsey can't make up her mind if it's right, can you?"

"You're only to pay a farthing for a blue lie; we're saving up all our farthings," said Francis.

"There's something very particular we want to ask you, Planty."

"Well, I'm listening," said Mr. Russell.

"What is a troubadour, please?" Mr. Russell was relieved; some of his pupils' questions were sometimes most embarrassing, but here was one quite historical and straightforward.

"They were early singers—poets who wrote songs to sing to people."

"What did they sing about?" said Francis.

"They generally had a lady-love, and they sang her praises."

"Are there any troubadours now?"

"Oh, no, of course not; civilization did away with many ancient customs."

"We're thinking," said Louis, "if the Country Gentlemen Society is too difficult for people—you know about the fibbing—even our Jim says everybody tells fibs sometimes, but we told him that was a fib—well, we thought we'd have another society called 'The Troubadours.'"

"Yes, excellent," said Mr. Russell; he was looking at the park gates, where Miss Sylvia Hales was standing waiting to speak to the twins.

"You write poetry, don't you, Planty, so you could join, and have you got a lady-love? We'll give you the name of an old troubadour, and you'll have to pretend you're him! Oh, there's Miss Sylvia," and the boys scampered up to the Vicar's

sister. She was thirty now, and the fresh beauty had a little faded from her face, but she was still very pretty and still discontented. Everything, she thought, had gone against her ; her mother was dead and her brother was more and more absorbed in his parish work. She kept his house, and acted almost as a curate ; she visited the poor, and taught in the Sunday school, but it was all very dull work. Mrs. Waycott did what she could to make her life more interesting, but she still mourned the lost love of her youth, so that life offered very little that was worth having—at least, that was what she felt and often said. At the bottom of her heart she envied Toney, who had all that heart could desire ; it was very unfair, very !

CHAPTER IV.

THREE LOVERS AND ONE LOVE.

It was a most unfortunate meeting for the tutor, and Mr. Russell had afterwards much cause to regret it, for when he came up to Sylvia Hales and took off his hat politely, he was greeted with:

"We've told Miss Sylvia, Mr. Russell, we really have."

"How do you do, Miss Hales?" he answered, trying to look quite natural. "What did these will-o'-the-wisps tell you?"

"We've told her you're going to be a troubadour, and we told her she was to be your lady-love!"

Mr. Russell and Sylvia laughed; there was nothing else to do! Neither of them had ever given each other a thought beyond mere politeness. Sylvia said to herself she lived only in the past, which meant that she was always regretting Captain Kemp, the young officer who had forsaken her without warning and had basely married a widow of means. On his side Plantagenet Russell had always instinctively

fled from the female sex, as being too difficult to deal with, or even to understand. Nothing the twins could have said or done could have caused such consternation on both sides as was felt to-day by these two.

"Mr. Russell said he thought it would be a very good game, Miss Sylvia—it's historical, you know; we found it out all ourselves in an old book, but we mean to play it in earnest."

"Mrs. Waycott lets them browse in that library pasture rather recklessly," said Mr. Russell, "and they do pick up queer ideas, but——"

"Of course we must each take the name of a troubadour; we'll look one out for you," said Louis, and Francis added:

"But we must never disclose the name of our lady-love to other people. It isn't honourable. But we'll all find one."

"We may just hint it to each other, Francis, mayn't we?" asked Louis anxiously.

Sylvia had recovered herself now, and interrupted the speakers.

"What rubbish you boys do talk. Please, Louis, will you tell Mrs. Waycott that we are going to have a school feast in the Vicarage garden next week; she says she always likes to come and help us."

"And we must come too," answered Louis. "We might choose our ladies there, couldn't we, Francis?"

At this point Miss Hales disappeared, and Mr. Russell thought it wiser to say nothing more on the subject. He turned the conversation to hunting.

"I hear that Jim is to go with you to the meet as well as your father and mother."

"Yes, Planty, dear, we're going out hunting. Mumsey said, 'Let them learn early, as I did,' and Pupsey said, 'It isn't very safe, darling,'" remarked Louis.

"You shouldn't repeat private conversations," said Mr. Russell.

"It wasn't private; but do you know, Planty, that Mumsey and Pupsey are very 'fectionate when no one is looking," said Francis, "and Mumsey doesn't like secrets; she says you ought not to have anything to hide."

"But little boys can't understand—— Ahem!" A pained look on the faces of the twins stopped the tutor's sentence.

"We're country gentlemen now, and we are going hunting to-morrow; please, Planty, would you mind not calling us 'little boys.' You see Brother Jim and Brother Bob and Brother Grant wouldn't like to be brothers to little boys, would they?"

"Oh, wouldn't they? but Brother Grant is deaf, you know, he wouldn't hear," said Mr. Russell lamely.

"No, but he'd sort of feel it, wouldn't he? So

though we were little boys yesterday, we mustn't be little boys any more now, please."

"Good heavens!" muttered poor Mr. Russell; "well, look here, I think I've changed my mind about your Country Gentlemen Society. I think I'll join it, and you can leave off the troubadours."

It was a sop to Cerberus, for Mr. Russell was now so much afraid of the Troubadour Society that he eagerly accepted what he had refused yesterday. Alas! he forgot with whom he had to deal.

"We don't quite know, Planty. I wonder now why you have changed your mind?" said Louis.

"Oh, I've reconsidered my decision."

"You didn't much like it about paying for fibs, did you?" said Francis. "Have you made up your mind not to tell any more?"

"No, I didn't care about it, but I see now there was a great deal of—ahem!—of sense in it."

"Well, we are glad you do, but I think you'd do better for the Troubadour Society; you see you can't expect Captain Grant to look for a lady-love, because he talks only on his fingers, and you can't say—— What was it, Louis?"

"Would you like an example, Planty; we've learnt it by heart?"

"Example of what?" said poor Mr. Russell floundering.

"It's the story of Madame Guillemette; you must know it, don't you?" asked Louis.

"Never heard of the lady."

"Well, I'll tell you," said Francis earnestly. "Three lords came to see her to see which of them she liked best. One sat on her right hand and the other on her left hand."

"And the other in front of her, Planty, you understand," added Louis.

"Oh, yes, perfectly."

"One is called Savari, and one Gancelin, and the other Hugh," continued Louis.

"And what do you think she did to them? You see, if you're a troubadour, you must know all this."

"Oh, must I? It's rather more than I bargained for; I can't imagine how she managed all three at once."

"Well, it was like this," said Francis. "She eyed Gancelin with tenderness, the book says, pressed the hand of Hugh, and touched the foot of Savari. Now, Louis, you begin; we learnt it by heart, Planty, but it's awkward being only two, so we'll teach you to act the third one."

"I think I shall be content with your version of it."

"Well, I'm Gancelin—'The lady showed most affection to me because I received the tender look that always arises from the soul: to touch the foot may arise from accident.'"

"Now I'm Hugh—'In my opinion the look is

of no signification, for kind looks are addressed to all as well as to those who are foolishly entrapped by them. Touching a foot is nothing, but when a white hand—— ' Go on, Louis."

" ' Presses tenderly its friend, this is a certain proof of love,' " added his brother.

" And then the foot-man goes on—' To touch the foot is a favour of the highest kind, because hidden from the penetration of others. . . .' Oh, Planty, what do you say, which was right ? You might try all three ways, don't you think, on Miss Sylvia ? "

Mr. Russell groaned inwardly.

" You would have to go on your knees, Planty, as you're so tall."

" She wouldn't know what he was doing, so he'd have to explain."

" Our time is up," said Mr. Russell, " we must go in. Where did you find this—troubadour book, Louis ? "

" It's one of the library books ; Mumsey lets us read anything there, you know. It's a wonderful book ; we'll tell you some more out of it another day."

" I think one of the two of our societies would do for nearly everybody, wouldn't they, Planty ? " asked Francis earnestly.

" I like the ' Country Gentlemen ' best," said Mr. Russell decidedly.

"Oh, it's only because we haven't explained 'The Troubadours' well. It is all beautiful, it really is, Planty; you choose a young woman and you make yourself her knight! Why, Savari says, 'Lady, you have conquered all the world! It is the height of my ambition to conquer you. We are five hundred of us, explain your wishes!'"

"No, he says first, 'Who will punctually execute your orders. Our coursers are bridled, we will mount them instantly in your cause.'"

"Isn't that beautiful? When we go hunting to-morrow we do so wish we had a lady-love to think about."

"We promise not to take Miss Sylvia, because she's yours."

"Our Rosa might do; she's very nice, but she always does what we tell her, and ladies should be very difficult to please."

"Who will reach the door first?" exclaimed Mr. Russell, and this time his ruse answered, and the boys raced off towards home.

"Good gracious!" murmured Mr. Plantagenet Russell to himself, "I hope they will forget it all by to-morrow."

It was a pious wish, but unfortunately for him it was not granted.

CHAPTER V.

A NIGHT EXCURSION.

Mr. Plantagenet Russell was retiring to bed that night very late, after finishing some work in his study which he had not had time to get through during the day. It was half-past twelve o'clock when he opened his bedroom door and slipped into his dressing-gown. The twins' bedroom was opposite to his, across the passage, and Mr. and Mrs. Waycott slept beyond theirs again. Toney would not allow the twins to be waited on more than was absolutely necessary. They had been brought up from infancy on fresh air, cold water, plain food, and no idleness except at recreation. Their playtime, however, was their own ; they were never told what to do, and indeed there was no need to amuse them, they understood the art perfectly.

It was at this moment in the midnight silence of the big house that Mr. Russell turned green at the remembrance of his meeting with Sylvia Hales ! He had often met her before, but he had, as it were,

never looked at her till the painful introduction of this afternoon. He of all men to be given a lady-love, and in her very presence! What must she think of it? He remembered her pale cheeks turning pink, and her hasty exit out of earshot. He had once said he should find no difficulty in educating the twins. Oh, how mistaken he had been!

"Anyhow," said Plantagenet Russell to himself, "I'll go and hide that dreadful book; they are such clever imps, something else will fill their minds if I can put this volume out of their reach."

The beautiful library with Tudor windows and oak-panelled walls was constantly used as a dwelling-room; indeed, tea was oftener served there than in the drawing-room; but Mr. Russell had never made himself acquainted with all the books it contained, and he did not in the least know where this troubadour volume might be found. He did not even know if the library possessed a catalogue.

"The next time I have some spare hours I'll begin that catalogue, if there is not one," Plantagenet Russell said very decidedly to himself; "but now I'll be on the safe side and hide that wretched book."

Taking up his candlestick he opened his bedroom door as quietly as he could for fear of being heard; then he waited in breathless silence outside his room, but not a sound disturbed the midnight stillness. Mr. Russell felt exactly like a thief, which was not

a pleasant sensation, but that thought was of course ridiculous. What should he say if anyone did hear him? The truth would certainly sound strange, but it would have to be spoken. With hasty precaution he hurried forward, tiptoed down the long passage till he reached the beautiful Tudor stairs leading down into the panelled hall filled with old trophies of ancient Waycott warriors. You then had to cross a second hall where lay the Crusader, a recumbent figure of some long bygone Waycott, evidently meant for a tomb, but whether erected here or taken from a church no one knew. The twins were immensely proud of their ancestor, in spite of Toney's republican ideas, which now and then she tried in vain to instil into them.

Mr. Russell now glanced fearfully at the Crusader. He half expected him to rise and ask him why his slumbers were being disturbed at this unreasonable hour, and then at last he reached the library door. The key was in the lock, and he had but to turn it; alas! it immediately gave forth an unearthly sound which made the tutor shudder. Should he be heard? What a terrible idea!

With his candle and his courage in his hand he hastily walked towards the nearest shelves. On this side they began on the floor, and went up to the ceiling, and there were no library steps at hand. Still the children could not anyhow have got hold of them, so the book must be on the ground line, or

just above it. Mr. Russell had to lie down flat on the floor in order to decipher the names, while he held up his feeble light. Would luck favour him, and would he soon discover what he was in search of? Were the books classified? No, they did not look like it. Gerard's 'Herbal' was side by side with "The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World," and "Don Quixote" was nudging Sismondi's "Republics," but Mr. Russell possessed great determination of character, so he continued to crawl patiently round on the floor, when suddenly—oh, horror!—his candlestick fell from his hand and rolled noisily on the polished floor, the candle went out, and he was left in utter darkness. He paused for a moment to consider what he should do next, when to his terror he heard hurried and shuffling footsteps outside, and the next instant the door was flung open, and a gruff, trembling voice said:

"Who's there?" It was the quavering bass voice of the butler.

Should he say "Only me," or "Only Mr. Russell?" He was still flat on his stomach, and dared not move till he had settled which of the two he should answer, or whether he should still lie low and say nothing. But his indecision was fatal, for Mr. Goodman, the butler, next uttered a quavering call for help. His small lamp only threw fitful light on the deep shadows, and he was afraid of

saying anything more after his pathetic question of "Who's there?" had received no reply.

"Harthur," he called out, "Harthur, come 'ere," and the young footman was heard approaching in a panting condition.

"Lor', Mr. Goodman! did you hear it too?"

"Distinctly, Harthur, some one is in this room."

"But they can't get out if we lock 'em up, sir." Evidently "Harthur" was mortally afraid of having to investigate the large room and its deep shadows. If only Mr. Russell could now have stood up he would have said: "It's only me," but he had decided that silence was safer. The two might scream, or bang him on the head with a poker, or what not. Arthur's idea of locking him up was, however, a terrible thought. He *must* do something; so he first coughed and then immediately called out:

"Goodman!"

By this time Arthur was frantic with fear.

"Oh sir, come away . . . it's a robber; he'll shoot us, he'll——"

"Harthur!" said Goodman solemnly, "you're a fool. I recognize Mr. Russell's voice."

"Oh, no, sir! it came quite low down from the far corner, and Mr. Russell is tall, sir."

"Goodman," repeated Mr. Russell angrily, now turning on his side so that he could manage to kneel

up, and then struggle to his feet, "Goodman, give me a light!"

But Arthur at the top of his voice had already shouted "Thieves! Robbers! Murder!" before the unfortunate Mr. Russell could grope along the floor and pick up his candlestick. The candle in it was broken in half, but the broken end still held on to its forlorn position, and as Mr. Russell clutched it he said, in a tone of great disgust:

"Hang it! Can't you give me a light, one of you, and for goodness' sake be quiet, Arthur."

"It's you, sir! I said it was, but we did not expect to see you, sir, here in the dark," said Goodman in an offended tone.

"Of course not. I only came to fetch a book. Don't wake the household, whatever you do!"

Alas! this advice came too late; first Mr. Waycott in his dressing-gown came running down, then Toney in hers followed him, then sundry maids appeared, only to find Mr. Russell in their midst attired in his dressing-gown, holding his broken candle and looking terribly guilty.

"I'm dreadfully sorry! I only came down to get a book I—wanted," he said hesitatingly.

Toney's laugh was reassuring.

"We wouldn't have got up for you, Mr. Russell! Goodman, whatever do you mean by——"

"Harthur heard a voice from the floor, ma'am, in the dark! It was enough to make your flesh creep, and to make him call out."

"Yes, indeed, Goodman," said the Squire, "what on earth did you disturb us all like this? You don't think Mr. Russell is a thief?"

At this moment—oh, horror!—a sort of hurricane was heard coming down the stairs, and the twins in their nightshirts and no dressing-gowns stood panting in their midst.

"Oh, Mumsey! Pupsey! we heard it—'Murder! Thieves!' But what a lot of you. We came to help you."

"Nonsense, children, go straight back to bed; it's only Mr. Russell who came down to fetch a book."

"Only Mr. Russell! Oh, Mumsey! we did hope it was a real robber. Do you know it's nearly one o'clock, we looked at the clock. It would have been a real troubadour adventure if he had been a real robber."

Mr. Russell shuddered at the word "troubadour," and was speechless before his pupils.

"If you don't run straight back to bed, both of you, I shall carry you," said the Squire smiling.

"Oh, Planty, I mean Mr. Russell, say you were really a robber. Did you come to steal a book?" asked Louis.

They were slowly retreating, their white night-shirts and bare feet gleaming in the heterogeneous illumination.

"You sleepy heads!" said Toney, "as if Mr. Russell mightn't have all the books he liked! Come, sonnies, I'm sorry that stupid Arthur woke you!"

The bare feet were very reluctantly mounting stair by stair.

"Mr. Russell didn't say he wasn't stealing, did he, Francis?"

"No, he was afraid of losing a penny! Oh, Mr. Russell, your candle does look funny!" exclaimed Louis, looking back over his shoulder at the curious crowd below.

Toney laughed too.

"It was hard on you to be taken for a thief, Mr. Russell. Now, Louis and Francis, one, two, three, be off at once."

"We weren't a bit afraid, were we, Mumsey?"

"Who said you were, sonnies?"

"Mr. Russell didn't look pleased with us. We didn't do any harm, did we? We really, really thought it was a robber when we heard Arthur shouting," said Louis.

"I heard 'Murder!'" added Francis.

"And I heard 'Thieves!' Oh, Mumsey! to think it was only Mr. Russell, and it might have been a real robber."

"Perhaps it was," said Francis slowly.

A hasty opening of their door, and a gentle shoving of their persons into their room, finished their adventure; but when once more they were tucked into their little beds and left alone, Francis called out very gently:

"Louis, are you asleep?"

"No, Francis, I'm not, are you?"

"No, I want to say I've had a thought."

"Let's hear it."

"Planty went to steal our troubadour book, I think."

"Oh, of course! Wasn't it lucky that we went first?"

"Wasn't it?"

"Perhaps he wanted to learn, too, how to speak properly to Miss Sylvia."

"I say, Francis, is it all right?"

"Yes, but rather hard for my head, only I slip off when it gets too hard."

"We mustn't talk any more, Mumsey'll hear us, and I am so sleepy."

"But, you see, Planty *was* trying to be a thief."

"I thought he looked funny! Mumsey says you can see things on peoples' faces."

"I saw it on his face."

"We should never have got it back again."

"Never! He'd have slept with it under his

pillow, and he wouldn't have given it back to us."

"No, and we have lots more to teach him. Oh!" After this the twins slept the sleep of the utterly happy and satisfied.

CHAPTER VI.

O ANCESTORS!

THE next day was Sunday, and the twins were awakened by Rosa, their maid, who filled two large tubs with cold water.

"Now, Master Louis! Master Francis, are you awake?"

It was Francis who made the earliest spring out of bed, but Louis who dashed first into his tub. The rubbing that followed, the gurgles and the "ohs!" did not take long, and they were soon left to dress alone, their Sunday suits being carefully placed ready for them on two chairs.

"You know, Louis, it's Sunday, so we can't read 'The Troubadours.' It isn't quite a Sunday book, is it?"

"No, but we must hide it. Rosa goes to all our drawers, but our lockers are safe. Do you think Planty ever looks in?"

"No, I don't, because it wouldn't be honourable. I'll climb up and hide it under our fishing

nets. Just look in, Francis, and tell me if you see it?"

"No, it's safe till Monday. Do you think Planty will look again for the book at night?"

"No, he didn't like waking up everybody. Did you see his dressing-gown, wasn't it lovely? Red flowers and things all over?"

"I'm going to play the morning hymn, Louis. Do try to learn the tune," and quick as lightning Francis took out a beautiful little violin given to him by his godfather, and very softly played "Awake, my soul, and with the sun."

"It's a little bit like 'Pop goes the weasel,' isn't it?" said Louis, quite seriously, having tried hard to recognize the tune.

"Oh," said Francis, "why that's like that—— Oh! I forgot I mustn't play Monday tunes, Louis, and the little fellow repeated "Awake, my soul," with a strain of sadness in it. Francis' one sorrow was that Louis did not love music, of which he was so passionately fond.

"Now it's prayer time," said Louis, speaking with the authority of the eldest, and both boys knelt down and said their prayers. Louis' special private petition to-day was, "Please, God, make us good troubadours, and good country gentlemen"; but Francis' prayer was, "Please, God, make Louis know when I play 'Awake my soul.'"

After prayers the brothers looked critically round the room.

"Mumsey says boys ought to be as tidy as girls, but I don't quite agree, do you, Francis?"

"Mumsey's generally right," said Francis, "but I did hear Gan-Aunt Dove say, 'Pray, Antonia, don't let your boys be girls.'"

"I wish the big people always agreed, don't you, Francis? Oh, dear, there's my nighty in the tub; what will Rosa say?"

"She won't say nothing, but Mumsey will! Take one end, Louis, and I'll take the other, and we'll wring it."

"No, it will water our Sunday suits, we'll let it swim a bit. Now, are you ready, Francis?"

This meant that before going down both boys threw themselves against the door leading to their father's dressing-room, happily firmly bolted on the other side.

"Good morning, Pupsey; good morning, Mumsey; have you finished your 'Wake, my soul'? We have."

"Well, go down; Mumsey's having her bath."

"Did she go in head first, Pupsey? We did."

"Off with you. You'll make me late." Lewis Waycott was dying to open the door and to see the four blue eyes, but refrained, past experience telling him that if he gave in he would be late.

So the twins opened their own door, and went

demurely downstairs. No banister-sliding allowed on Sunday, and they always tried to be honourable. At the bottom of the stairs they met Arthur, and had a serious conversation with him, then Louis remarked:

"We'll have time to pay our respects to our ancestor before breakfast; I heard a gentleman telling Pupsey how the little Jappies think no end of theirs."

"It's very noble of them. Mumsey doesn't care much for ancestors, but Pupsey does, and Aunt Honoria thinks no end of all the Waycotts."

"Of course we must, too," said Louis. "Come on, and I'll show you how to do it."

They hurried on to the second hall where the stone Waycott ancestor reposed in his suit of mail armour half covering his crossed legs.

"I know where Polly hides her dusters," said Francis. "Let's dust the ancestor, and then we'll do the worship."

"It's quite different to worshipping idols, you know, Francis. You think of your ancestors, and bend backwards and forwards and say, 'O Ancestors!' Then you think of all their virtues, and promise them you'll cultivate the same, and make your sons do it."

"Do you think that's what the Jappies do, Louis?" said Francis thoughtfully, as the pair carefully dusted the time-worn face, the shield,

the mail armour, and the patient dog at his feet.

"Yes, that's the way they do it. That was our ancestor's dog," said Louis; "I wonder if it was called Pasha Jones? Anyhow, we'll call him that, and that will do for Pasha Jones' ancestor. I'm so very, very fond of Pasha Jones, aren't you? Joseph asked me why we called him Jones, and I said *he* wouldn't like having no surname, so of course Pasha wouldn't, neither."

"I'm as fond of Pasha Jones as Mumsey was of Trick. We shall visit his grave to-day, too. It's lucky we can do all this on Sunday! Now, Francis, bend back very far till you think you're going to break in two, and say 'O Ancestors!'"

"I can bend farther than you, Louis! O Ancestors! O Ancestors!"

And when Toney came quickly downstairs she heard the distant wail, up and down the scale of "O Ancestors!" in the twins' voices, and Lewis joining her, both stopped and listened.

"It's in the Stone Hall, let's peep in?" said Toney.

They went like thieves and peeped in to see the two boys' acrobatic bendings, and to hear the piercing wailings of "O Ancestors!"

It was too much for them, and they retreated to the dining-room, only calling out:

"Louis! Francis! Where are you? Breakfast, please!"

The twins came running in, very red in the face and wearing rather crumpled collars.

"Whatever have you been doing?" said their father.

"Did you hear us, Pupsey? Didn't it sound chanty? Francis said I put the wrong note, but I was heard the best. We were worshipping our ancestors like the little Jappies. It's beautiful and pious, and we did enjoy it ever so! If our ancestor ever comes to look at his statue he must have heard us. Perhaps he does come on Sunday morning."

"Unless he is very deaf indeed I think he must have heard you," said Mr. Waycott.

"Whoever put that into your heads?" asked Toney.

"Pupsey talked to another gentleman about the virtues of the Jappies, and how we were wanting in reverence to our dead; are we, Mumsey?"

"*You* are not, anyhow; at least——"

"Then we'll just do it on Sundays. That will be often enough, won't it?"

"Oh, quite," said Toney smiling. "Now eat your breakfast and be silent."

The general breakfast was at half-past eight, and was usually a very cheerful meal. Toney had always set herself against luxury, so, though there was

abundance of food, there was no side-table groaning with choice dishes to tempt the jaded appetite of late risers. Unless anyone was ill they were expected to appear at breakfast, except Miss Honoria, who had hers in her own room, and did not appear till lunch-time.

To-day the breakfast had gone on for ten minutes before Mr. Russell appeared. The four blue eyes were on him when he spoke :

" I must beg pardon for being late, Mrs. Waycott."

"You were disturbed, weren't you ? " said Toney, laughing, and Mr. Waycott nodded also, smiling; but no smile was to be seen on Planty's face. His pupils stood up and said :

" Good morning, Mr. Russell." Their innocent faces spoke of no cruel amusement, he was glad to see.

" Good morning, Louis ; good morning, Francis," and all sat down.

He was determined not to ask them any questions so that the twins should get no chance of questioning him. He heard sighs and soft groanings uttered, but he took no notice. Unfortunately after five minutes discussing the weather with Mr. Waycott, Mr. Russell, forgetting his resolution, said hastily :

" Can you pass me the mustard, Louis, please ? "

A deep sigh of relief was heard.

" Oh, thank you, that's a question, isn't it ?

Here is the mustard, and Francis and I do so want to know if you found the book you were looking for, Mr. Russell?"

Eight eyes were all turned upon him suddenly, and Plantagenet Russell wished himself somewhere else.

"No, I did not, but I can easily have another hunt this afternoon in the daylight."

"If you told us the name," said Francis, "we might help you, because Louis and I know all the names on the bottom shelf, and the ones above, but we have to lie on our tummies for quite the bottom. Did you lie on yours, Mr. Russell?"

"I certainly had to stoop."

"It's easier if you lie quite flat. We saw Arthur just now, and he said——"

"No one asked you what Arthur said," interrupted Mr. Waycott, who was suppressing his mirth with difficulty.

"No," said Francis, "but you know, Pupsey, Arthur's very much hurt with you for scolding him. He says he 'honly did 'is duty'; he's just like Nelson, isn't he?"

"He should have found out what his duty was before disturbing us all," said Mr. Waycott.

"Arthur says he couldn't see anything like a man, but he heard a voice from the floor, and he does seem awful hurt."

"Does he?"

"He's a very tender heart, Pupsey; you'll make it up with him before night, won't you?"

"There's nothing to make up; it will teach him a lesson on self-restraint."

"Arthur says Mr. Russell wasn't a gentleman to say nothing when Goodman said, 'Who's there?' in his gruff voice, but I said if he said that again I should have him out."

"Have him out?"

"Yes, fight him."

"Good gracious, Louis, you mustn't fight with the footman," said Toney, trying to look grave.

"Can't help it, Mumsey. A true knight defends his friend, and Planty's our friend."

"Through thick and thin," added Francis, "and Arthur is very thick. Have you felt his arm, Mumsey, it's as hard as anything?"

"I don't need you to fight my battles," put in Mr. Russell, unable to suppress a grim smile.

"We won't now, dear Plan—dear Mr. Russell," answered Francis, "for Arthur had to bring it back."

"Bring what back?" asked the Squire.

"No, he means take it back," said Louis; "we stood over him and said, 'Arthur, say "Mr. Russell is a gentleman," or you'll have to fight us both.'"

"Did he cave in?"

"Quite like a gentleman, Pupsey. He said, 'Hit's as much as my place is worth, and I take it back, sirs.'"

"Then we said, 'That's handsomely done, Arthur, and we'll forget and forgive.'"

"All the same, Mr. Russell, you might have said 'Me,' when Goodman said 'Who's there?' Mumsey says servants have very delicate feelings."

"Have they? They differ very much from lit—from country gentlemen. Now, finish your breakfast, Louis."

Mr. Russell had a whole holiday on Sunday from the boys. He had accepted it unwillingly; but as time went on he was thankful to get one day's rest in seven. To-day he was more than grateful to be able to disappear and to consider his ways and the ways of two such extraordinary children!

After prayers, for which ceremony all the servants filed in—and the twins often counted them audibly—Toney took her sons with her to order dinner, so as to make sure she would have them ready for the Bible lesson and the catechism repetition afterwards. Later on came the walk to church, and the scamper home, the early dinner, and generally the visit to Stone House in the afternoon. On Sundays, too, they all visited Trick's grave, so as to show Pasha Jones how good dogs were loved if they lived a life such as Trick had lived, for over Trick's grave was a stone on which was written: "Here lieth the body of a true friend. His soul still lives with us." This inscription the twins were never tired of reading. To them it was sublime.

CHAPTER VII.

SYLVIA THE FORSAKEN.

Toney loved her sons as only Toney could love them, but even she was not altogether sorry when on this special Sunday they begged her to let them go to Trick's grave alone and home across the park with Pasha Jones. They were still intoxicated with their new gift of trust and liberty.

"Well, Lewis, now we can have a walk by our two selves, as soon as I leave Stone House," said his wife. Their greatest treat was still to be alone together, though they rarely indulged themselves. They settled they could walk through the woods and visit a distant gamekeeper who was always in a state of wrath about the villagers not being shut out of the woods by order of "her ladyship." If her ladyship came with him, Lewis felt he would hear fewer complaints, for Toney had "a way with her" which softened the stoniest keeper's heart.

"What a heavenly day, Lewis, my ownest; and hasn't the time gone like lightning since you came back from London that dreadful day after the Aldersfield fire? I can't help still laughing when I remember my sorrow, believing you loved Maud whilst I realized I cared only for you, and then I found Maud in your study almost in Edward Lang's arms. What a silly I had been, but, oh! I was glad."

"Time wears hundred-league boots for us now, but those few days I was away were each like a thousand years; I couldn't bear the thought of your fortune! But, look here, Toney, your chum, Mrs. Faber, wrote a private letter to me yesterday to say you're working too hard, and that I'm not taking care of you enough."

"What rubbish; you know she and the piccaninnies are coming on Tuesday, and her 'dear Henry,' too, till the end of the week. They do enjoy their trips abroad and their visits here, and it sort of unstiffens them a bit! Oh, Lewis! what is the matter with 'His Royal Highness' to-day? He was so unlike his usual self; and what is the mystery about the library book?"

"I can't imagine; so unlike him to deal in secrets. But, honour bright, Toney, your sons are Toney-essence in large doses!"

"Oh, Lewis, how can you say so! Francis is so unlike me—and not much like you. The darling!

doesn't his morning hymn sound sweet? I opened my door on the sly to hear it better."

"And so Jeanie and the great Frank Weston are coming, too, this week, and Maud and her lord."

"That lord has been a success, Lewis. It almost converts me to the peerage. He developed a capacity for making money, and, you know, that's quite middle-class, and he keeps Maud in great luxury. He thinks nothing too good for her. We haven't seen them since their return from South America, where he made a pile!"

"You'll wear yourself out, dearest, with all these people, and Stone House, and the village, and heaven knows what else!"

"We'll not rust out, anyhow; but, oh, Lewis! did you ever see anything so funny as the worship of the ancestors? You can't accuse me of teaching the twins that, anyhow? It comes direct from you. I'd never have suspected it in you if it hadn't come out in your sons!"

"But about that hunting to-morrow; are you *sure* the boys can stick on in the rush?"

"Dead sure, for Jim and I just put them through their paces; and though Louis is a born hunter, Francis sticks on through sheer strength of will. I told them they weren't to get into people's way, and not to forget to be gentlemen."

"But an accident so soon happens!"

"Pups used to say we live only half our lives if we start at all the shadows."

"I'm not like your father, Toney! My heart jumps into my mouth when those boys get into danger. They seem to belong to all our people as well as to ourselves. Remember that."

"But also we have to make them strong and self-reliant! I'm so afraid of their getting like some of the sons of some of the mothers we see! Do you know, Lewis, darling, I've taught my chum to train and trust her chicks, but even so they don't look like ours!"

"Perhaps she's rather glad," said the Squire smiling.

"The boys are planning games already for the Fabers. I expect we shall be made to sit up then."

"I hope not—at least not more than usual—for I'm always sitting up! Look, Toney, let's sit down here in the shelter under these trees; I remember so well when I made it I thought, 'She'll never sit here with me.'"

"Not much of a prophet, were you?" Toney lifted her head and sniffed in the spring as she used to do when a girl. "But, honestly, Lewis, there's some new maggot in the boys' heads! Francis asked me this morning, as we walked to church, what a jongleur was! I told him his namesake, St. Francis, called himself 'God's jongleur,' and he looked quite sweet and understanding."

"I tremble all the more when they look what you call 'sweet and understanding,'" and with a merry laugh the two relapsed into that perfect silence which unites more closely those who love deeply.

Presently the silence was suddenly broken by voices close beside them behind the shelter. There was no time to move, so they sat still, for it was only Mr. Russell's rather deep, slow tones.

"Indeed, Miss Hales, you don't imagine for a moment that I had anything to do with it? I have been trying to find you to offer you my humblest apologies."

"No, I did not, Mr. Russell. I don't think you know one woman from another!"

"You are much mistaken. I noticed how your colour came in displeasure, and I felt I must ask for your forgiveness."

"Of course, I forgive——" the voices were getting farther off, and soon inaudible. Toney and her husband looked at each other.

"We couldn't help it, could we? Gracious stars! I never thought how nice it would be to marry 'His Royal Highness' to Sylvia. It's the twins' idea, evidently."

"Pray do nothing to further it, Toney! I forbid it!"

"I suppose you've found the married state very disappointing?"

"No, but 'His Royal Highness' is rather like

a bit of parchment, and Sylvia Hales is a most lackadaisical, sentimental old maid."

"Oh, thirty isn't an old maid! She was very cut up, of course, when that horrid Captain Kemp found a wife; for she always believed he would come back and marry her, but he never did, even when he got his promotion. He only married a rich widow. It's enough to make her dumpy."

"Time changes ideals."

"Does it? How horrid! But I hope he likes his rich widow. Disgusting!"

Lewis laughed.

"You used to say money was nothing, and made no difference."

"Not when your true love is waiting for you!" said Toney.

"Well, her sighs were not so deep as were those of Louis this morning at breakfast!"

"But what *can* Mr. Russell have done wrong? He is usually so correct!" laughed Toney; "but I actually saw him blush!"

"I bet you anything it's something to do with your terrible sons."

"Impossible!"

In the meanwhile Mr. Russell strolled on by Sylvia's side, and the sweet spring air blew into their faces. Sylvia's pretty, though rather sad, face was tinged again with youthful pink, and as she spoke she looked up into the handsome face of

Plantagenet Russell. He was not at all like the dashing young officer who had made love so easily to her and who had won her heart only to throw it away. Making love seemed very far from Mr. Russell's ideas, only he was so much perturbed about this terrible new game invented by the twins. It wasn't worth bothering about, she said, still Sylvia enjoyed walking through the wood with him. A handsome man is always of interest to a woman of thirty who is lonely, and has lost all hope of a happy future. She was, of course, very fond of her brother, but he lived in his parish work and his ideas were all of one mould, whilst Sylvia felt that her happiness had flown with her romance and would never return. She knew that even now if she met Frank Kemp, and if he should lift his finger to recall her, she would fly to him in spite of his widow; and that would, she knew, be very, very wicked! Still she did not outwardly show that she enjoyed her walk; she was very quiet and unresponsive, and Mr. Russell was rather surprised that his abject apology resulted in nothing more than, "Oh, it doesn't matter at all, Mr. Russell, one never knows what the twins will say next. Toney should be stricter with them."

Mr. Russell looked down at the fair and gentle lady by his side, and said:

"I expect *you* would manage them with a look! I used to think I could, but——"

"Have you failed? Of course children never are good when living with spoiling parents close at hand."

"No," said Mr. Russell sadly, "it isn't that. I have quite a free hand; Mrs. Waycott is wonderful. But . . . if you were confronted by four blue and apparently very innocent eyes you would often be off your guard. Those children are too terribly clever for words or human understanding."

"When they go to school they will soon be subdued," said Sylvia decidedly.

"Not if they went together. What poor man could stand imploring glances from four blue eyes." Then Mr. Russell saw that two very blue eyes were at that minute turned towards him—how could he have said anything so foolish? Of course Miss Hales would believe he was making idiotic compliments.

The end of the wood had come.

"I must go on quickly with a message to Stone House," he said abruptly, and raising his hat he hurried away, feeling as if he had made a fool of himself for no good purpose.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTERNOON TEA.

It was after the afternoon service that the twins roamed around the old Norman church built by a pious Waycott ancestor. Happily the church restorations had been made at an enlightened period and the old work was preserved, but a big porch had been added a hundred years ago, and though the addition was useful, it was not altogether in keeping with the Norman style. In one way it was, however, original, for it was now filled in with coloured glass, and in one of the lights was the picture of a dog in a waiting attitude sitting outside this very church. Underneath were these words: "In memory of a faithful friend. Thou God shall save both man and beast."

As the twins came out of the church they looked at this window very solemnly and nodded towards it, and if a stranger was with them they hastened to explain that this was Trick's window!

"Mumsey loved Trick awfully much, and she

put up that window to his memory ; she says there's only one other window to a dog in England, and that's the pedlar's dog window at Lambeth. The pedlar put himself in it, too, but she couldn't put up a window to herself, though she awfully wanted to be there too."

Visitors tried to hide their displeasure by saying, " Very strange," for this window had raised quite a storm in the country when Toney had dared to put it up in memory of her dog !

The twins next conducted the visitor to Trick's grave, for there it was that Pasha Jones always waited for them during service time, and these were their usual remarks :

" This is Trick's grave; you see it's just in the churchyard."

" Mumsey said Trick must have Christian burial, and its Pupsey's land—he gave it to the church—so he said she might."

The visitor usually said, " Oh, indeed," in a shocked tone.

To-day they had no visitor to show Trick's grave to, but as usual they came to release Pasha Jones.

" Dear Pasha Jones," said Louis, kneeling down and putting his arm round the big dog's neck, " we've been a long time, but the sermon was rather long, so we couldn't help it, could we, Francis ? '

" It's quite true, Pasha Jones," said Francis,

"but you're very glad to see your masters, aren't you, dear?"

Pasha Jones said "Yes" in his way quite plainly, by wagging his tail and jumping on his little masters.

"Anyhow, he's had time to worship at the grave of his ancestors," said Louis.

"I don't think Trick can be an ancestor to Pasha Jones, because he was quite a small dog."

"Yes, he was small. Mother said she couldn't have any other dog like Trick, so she gave us the biggest dog she could find. Are you glad, Francis?"

"Yes, and no; sometimes I wish Pasha Jones was a little smaller, but it isn't nice to wish to alter your friends, is it? I think he understands about Trick; he always puts his big paws over the grave, doesn't he?"

"You know all the Fabers are coming this week, and lots more, so—well I've a lovely idea: we'll have a play to amuse the company. Mumsey often says she can't think how to amuse people who can't be amused."

"Yes, silly people."

"I've a lovely idea about Richard Cœur de Lion. He was a troubadour, you know, Francis, so he'll do, and after the play we might get more members."

"Yes, we might have Sunday troubadours and weekday ones—the Sunday ones must be called 'Jongleurs.'"

"We'll think it out; and Mr. Russell said we might act 'The Burghers of Calais' too; he read that story yesterday very nicely, didn't he?"

"Yes, he doesn't read at all badly, but not so good as Mumsey; she just acts all the people; but of course Mumsey's better than anybody else in everything."

"We'll think it out to-morrow. I don't think we ought to think of Monday troubadours to-day. Mumsey said the Sunday ones only sang hymns. Let's race with Pasha Jones now," and the remainder of their free time was spent in fine games with Pasha Jones.

All the family met for tea on Sundays in the library, and no happier party could have been found in England. On this day even Pasha Jones was allowed to come in and have tea in the library with his two adoring masters.

Toney looked radiantly happy, having had such a nice walk alone with her husband, but there was certainly a look of mischief in her eyes. The twins, on their side, looked rather too good, as they sat near their father, and rather too much like models for "a happy family." Aunt Honoria's keen eyes went from one to the other, and remembrances of the past made her smile. What troublous days had followed when Mrs. Waycott of Waycott Hall had first broken away from several absurd trammels and prejudices of the county families; but Toney's

personal character, and perhaps her money, had saved her from complete ostracism. Stone House, too, had not been built without many conservative remarks, such as "That radical Mrs. Waycott is pauperizing the neighbourhood, and soon no one will be free to call their money their own." Now and then Toney had been saddened by being so much misunderstood, but her husband had always been her tower of strength. If now and then, however, he firmly dissented, Toney knew she must give in, and never did anyone give in more gracefully and more good-temperedly; but these occasions were rare, and even her enemies had not ruined her high spirits.

"What did you do this afternoon, Mr. Russell?" she asked innocently as she poured out a big cup of tea, for there was nothing small at Waycott.

"Was it a book, or a nap, or a solitary tramp that beguiled you?" asked Lewis.

"I had a walk in the woods," said Mr. Russell, hesitating a little.

"Then we saw you, Mr. Russell," said Francis; "you were with——"

"I met Miss Hales," Mr. Russell interrupted for fear of his pupil's next remark.

"How nice. Sylvia Hales so seldom walks in the woods on Sunday," said Toney.

"She begged me to tell you that the school feast is next week, if you will help?"

"Of course—I do love a school feast. Won't you come and help, too, Mr. Russell?"

"Of course he will," said Francis, nodding in an understanding way to his tutor.

"Why, of course?" said Mr. Waycott. "I draw the line at a school feast, Russell."

"Yes, Pupsey, you haven't got to come, of course, but Mr. Russell is 'bliged to."

"Pray why? I'm sure I'll give you a dispensation, Russell."

"Oh, no, thanks. I dare say I can find time to come, Mrs. Waycott."

"There," said Francis, nodding again, "I told you, Pupsey, he would."

"You see he's a troubadour," added Louis.

"A good troubadour," echoed Francis.

"And if——"

Mr. Russell, getting desperate, let his knife clatter down on the polished floor, whereupon the boys rushed to the rescue.

"It's 'cause your lady-love will be there, isn't it?" whispered Louis to the unfortunate tutor.

"Perhaps she'll touch your hand," added Francis in a louder whisper; "she'll have to 'Kiss in the ring.' We won't tell."

Toney, wondering at the whispered conversation about a school feast, interrupted with:

"Aunt Honoria, do you remember my first arrival

here to tell you that my chum, Miss Crump, was engaged ? "

" I shall never forget it," said Miss Honoria.

" Well, you'll see her to-morrow with her piccaninnies. There are four now, and the last two match the twins."

" Oh, Aunt Honoria," said Louis, leaving the wretched tutor alone, " Harry is taller than we are, and older, and so is Toney-two."

" Toney-two ? "

" We have to distinguish," explained Toney. " I'm Toney-one, and she is Toney-two."

" But they are quite nice children," added Louis.

" I hope they say the same of *you*," sighed Toney.

" But John and James are real nice, Aunt Honoria, not so——" began Francis.

" So horse high," filled in Louis.

" Horse high ! " exclaimed the elders. " What's that ? "

" Mr. Russell said that Mrs. Hamilton was riding her high horse again. She hasn't got a horse, so he meant——"

" It's time you returned to private life, sonnies," said Mr. Waycott, " till your mother calls you."

The twins never minded dismissal, but as they returned to the schoolroom before the hour devoted to their Sunday reading, Louis remarked :

" It's funny, Francis, that elderses always want

to stop talking when it's a very, very interesting subject."

"Only our talking," said Francis; "they don't stop their own. Mr. Russell doesn't seem very cheerful to-day, does he?"

"No wonder; perhaps he has to think a lot about Miss Sylvia. I expect she'll make him do all sorts of things. Oh, Francis, I do want it to be to-morrow so as to read the book again."

"We can be jongleurs on Sunday, and they loved singing hymns. If you'll sit on the window-sill, Louis, I'll play to you; and if you don't like it you can look out of the window and think you're Richard Cœur de Lion in his prison looking for his troubadour."

There was no one to see this living picture, but any artist would have gazed in admiration at the scene. The one pair of blue eyes looking out with a world of expectation on the green landscape and the budding trees, and the other pair fixed on vacancy, within which he saw and heard visions which only those born with music in their souls can hear and see.

CHAPTER IX.

TALLY HO!

The Meet was at Lord Southbourne's, and Toney and her husband had planned everything so as to witness the debut of their sons as mighty hunters. The ponies had been sent to the village inn the night before to avoid the long ride, and the twins were to be taken over in a motor-car. Great was the excitement at Waycott Hall, but human plans are so very easily frustrated that it is surprising human beings spend so much time in making them. In the morning Rosa appeared with a long face just as Toney had nearly finished dressing.

"Please, ma'am, I'm so sorry."

"So am I, Rosa—that you're not quicker in telling me. What's the matter?"

"Miss Honoria's had a little fainting fit, and——"

Toney snatched at a few more garments, and ran to Miss Waycott's room. Her elderly maid was administering various remedies.

"I'm better, really, Toney. Don't distress yourself!"

"You do look quite seedy, dear Aunt Honoria. Lie still and we'll have Dr. Latham over in no time."

She ran to the telephone and soon all the house knew that the doctor was sent for. Lewis came hurrying to his aunt's room, much distressed.

"What a chapter of accidents!" said Toney, smiling. "Look here, Lewis, I'm not going hunting; Aunt Honoria comes first."

"Oh, no, Toney; she'd wish you to go."

Toney looked up at her husband, and he knew he could not alter her determination.

"The boys will get on all right. Our Jim will be there, and you."

"Me, Toney! I like that!"

"I guessed you wouldn't, Lewis. I'll just 'phone to Uncle Evas. He won't fail us. Listen. Hulloa! Uncle Evas—are you awake? Gracious stars! I hope he won't tell Aunt Dove. She always will want to know. Yes—are you there?"

"Bless me, barely awake, Toney. What's up? Don't shout too loud."

"I won't, ducky Uncle; but Aunt Honoria's not well: expecting Dr. Latham."

"Dear me! Can I help you?"

"Yes; the twins go hunting to-day—positively first appearance—you must be there!"

"What a responsibility!"

"Not at all. They'll stick on like leeches; but

don't say you can't see them, and ride over them by mistake."

"Can I stay with Miss Waycott instead?" A laugh.

"You bet! Good-bye. Awfully busy."

A ring, and Toney looked up laughing.

"Uncle Evas is awfully true. He'll be there even if he has to tide over Aunt Dove's corpse."

"Figuratively, I hope! Hulloa! Some one else: Dr. Latham's motor has come to grief; please send yours at once."

"There's something wrong with our stars," said Toney; "they're not gracious at all! Lewis, take the car and Jim, and you'll be back before it's time to start the boys."

Another ring.

"Hulloa! Is that you, Toney?"

"Oh, yes, a distracted me, Uncle Evas; what is it?"

"Awfully sorry, can't go after all! Maid's got scarlet fever; your Aunt says I might give it to the boys."

Toney had the decision of a first-rate general. Not for a moment had she thought of putting duty on one side for the pleasure of herself or of her sons, but this was a blow to her. She rarely hunted nowadays, and only as a great treat with her husband. It took too much time was all she said, but in truth she was always fighting against

self-indulgence and luxury. She did feel rather low.

"All right, Uncle; what can't be cured, you know; but it's a great disappointment. They'll be all right really with Jim. One in a thousand. Good-bye. Don't catch it."

At breakfast only Mr. Waycott, Mr. Russell, and the boys appeared. Toney would not leave Aunt Honoria's room for long together, and Lewis explained the situation to the boys and their tutor. Mr. Russell was much distressed; he suggested several alternatives, but added:

"We shan't alter Mrs. Waycott's made-up mind, shall we?"

Mr. Waycott smiled.

"We'll save our breath. Now listen, boys. Lessons first, and attention to them; then your mother says you must go hunting with Jim, and mind you behave like little gentlemen."

"Oh, Pupsey, like country gentlemen you mean," said Francis sadly; "have you forgotten?"

"Humph! Well, country gentlemen. Mind the rules of the hunt and of courtesy."

"Of course," said Louis, in a decided voice, "we know all about it, Pupsey, and more besides —don't we, Francis?"

"Yes. You know, Pupsey, our other society is 'The Troubadours.' I don't 'spect *you* know

all their laws. It takes very long to learn them every one."

"Rather antiquated for me," said Lewis, smiling. "I'm sorry your mother can't go—very sorry."

"I heard General Wilson say, Pupsey, that ladies were sometimes in the way."

"We don't mean Mumsey, of course; but Jim says some fat ladies are that jog about looking for their horses' tails."

"I rather fancy the fat ladies will say that little bo——"

"Don't, Pupsey, say it—please," exclaimed Louis, and the four blue eyes looked so sadly up at their father that he succumbed.

"Well, remember that you are being trusted to-day."

Then Mr. Russell hurried them off to their Latin in the schoolroom so as to keep them quiet till they had to start, and this had the desired effect.

The Meet was a brilliant affair. The weather was fine and bright, the pink flashed like shooting stars among the black coats, and the ladies, well reefed in, looked very animated, except a few who appeared somewhat nervous and insecure and very anxious to start at once out of this exciting and seething crowd. These ladies were few in number, and did not attract attention; but all the hunt sooner or later glanced with amused interest at the twins.

They were very serious, and very eager; seated firmly on their ponies, they looked exactly alike to outsiders, for both were dressed like diminutive country gentlemen going a-hunting. Every one had a kind word and a smile for them, which the twins returned by touching their hats with their whips in correct style, though here and there remarks were heard about foolish parents trusting two such small boys out with the hounds.

"Fancy sending those mites with only a groom! Much too small to be trusted; but what can you expect of Mrs. Waycott! They'll be awfully in the way." But the Master of the Hounds, who knew Toney, said, "Wait and see."

Then came a sudden, silent, onward sweep of the hounds, and the hunt was off! It trotted off to the covert; for a few minutes all was silence, then a wild "View Hallo!" was heard, and the hounds in full cry came pouring out into the open.

Never had the twins felt anything like it as they galloped beside Jim, who had as much as he could do to keep his hunter within bounds; but the twins' ponies were also thoroughbred, they would not be beaten, and they could certainly keep up.

"Come on," was all Louis could find breath to say; and Francis came on, but said nothing. Presently, following the scent, the hounds wheeled round and came plump on the diminutive huntsmen. Some, fearing a crash, muttered curses on hunting

babes, but the babes also quickly turned and found themselves ahead of the field.

"Oh, Francis! don't stop; we're leading."

"Louis, where's Jim?"

"Dunno; he's got mixed up with the big horses somehow."

Francis looked round and saw that they were alone in the crowd.

"Mumsey said we were to keep near Jim."

"No: he was to keep near us; but he couldn't help it."

"Wish we knew Oh, Louis! look—they're going across country!"

The twins pulled up and waited; as if by a miracle the hunt was out of sight, and only a few straggling horsemen could be seen.

The boys looked round; certainly they were alone. What should they do?

"I think Jim must have had a fall; we must go and look for him."

"Which way?" said Francis, glad of a rest.

"That way, over those fields," said Louis. He was not a bit afraid.

"Oh, Louis! wasn't the ride lovely? And all the sounds near the woods, and—I heard all the music of them; wish you had."

Louis shook his head.

"I don't hear any music; it was only your ears Francis."

"I wonder what the rule is when your groom has gone and left you," said Francis.

"You don't look for him, I don't think."

"Do you look for the fox? I suppose you look for something," said Francis.

"I think you look for pretty girls; at least I heard General Digby say, 'I've looked for a pretty girl, and there's only one.'"

"I expect he was looking for a lady-love. Come on, Louis, we oughtn't to be alone." Louis laid his small head on Punch's head and listened.

"Dear Punch, you have been an awfully good hunter."

"So has Judy," said Francis. "Now, Louis, lead the way, 'cause you're the eldest."

"I will," said Louis, with a determined air. "We'll say 'north, south, east, and west,' and then choose."

They said it and chose, but as they didn't know which part of the surrounding country answered to these names it did not much matter. Louis gave Punch a gentle flick and off the two trotted, doubling here and there to avoid big jumps, and scrambling through gaps in a most plucky style.

"There's the hunt, Francis, right out there. We're all right," exclaimed Louis.

"There's a jump coming, Louis."

"Yes, we must do it; there's no gap, and we must find Jim. I'll give you the lead, and say 'Tally

Ho!' and you just follow. Judy never refuses to follow Punch."

"Tally Ho!" shouted Louis, and Francis followed him, gripping his pommel and sticking tight as he saw his brother flying over a biggish water jump. There was a moment of supreme anxiety, a feeling of flying off the earth, and of landing down again in a slippery place, and a mighty effort to reach terra firma, and then both ponies stood quiet and panting as if to congratulate themselves and their masters.

"Oh!" said Louis, 'fust-rate,' as Jim says."

"Louis! Oh, Louis, look!"

Louis was looking. Just close by the place they had jumped, and indeed so near that it was a wonder they had not alighted on her, lay a young lady flat on her back; no horse was visible, and her eyes were closed. Francis threw himself from his saddle.

"Louis, hold Punch and Judy, and I'll see if——"

Louis held the ponies, Francis knelt by the prostrate form.

"We've found her!" exclaimed Louis. "You see, Francis, this is a lady in distress!"

Francis' small strong hands tried to lift the lady's head upon his lap, which brought forth a feeble moan.

"Can you dip a handkerchief in water, Louis? Knights always do that."

It was not easy, holding the two ponies, but Louis managed to dip his handkerchief in the ditch and to hand it to his brother. The cold water had the desired effect and the lady opened a pair of very dark eyes.

"Oh, dear!" Then seeing the minute country gentleman, she laughed softly.

"Do you feel better?" said Louis, and she, looking round, and seeing another minute country gentleman, laughed again and slowly sat up, helped by Francis.

"It's very kind of you! Wasn't it silly of my horse to stumble here? And he pitched me right over his head, and then took French leave. I suppose I was a bit stunned."

"Here's some more water," said Francis. "Have you any other commands?"

"Commands! I should think not! Who are you, kind boys?"

"We're troubadours," murmured Francis, in a low voice.

"You're playing the game awfully well, anyhow! You might have gone on——"

"It's against our rules," said Louis. "Fair lady, will you tell us your name? If you'd rather not, you can make up another name."

"Oh, I've no objection!" She laughed softly again. Was she dreaming, or were these "little people"? "My name is Mary Fitzpatrick."

"Thank you very much. What would you like us to do now?"

Mary Fitzpatrick was feeling her legs and arms.

"No bones broken, and I'm awfully hungry."

No sooner said than Louis produced a neat packet of sandwiches, and Francis knelt on one knee to give them to her.

"I was glad you didn't ask for fruit—we ate our apples long ago."

"Well, will you help me up? I feel a little stiff. Or rather, please, bring the pony here, and I'll hoist myself, or I might——" She didn't finish her sentence, which had been "knock you down." With the help of Punch, of Louis, and Francis, Miss Mary Fitzpatrick at last stood on her feet.

"I really think I'm all right, except my ankle feels a bit queer. How ever shall I walk? Where are we? Let me see. Oh—Jock's Clump, that's close to my home. If you don't mind coming with me."

"We always see our ladies home," said Francis.

"When they can walk; I suppose you don't carry them"—and the dark, laughing eyes looked down on her wee troubadours. She herself was about eighteen, and very pretty to look upon. Louis ignored the question, but looked at his pony.

"If you don't mind riding Punch I'll lead him, and Francis can ride on and prepare your parents.

People always prepare other people's parents for sad news, don't they?"

The Fitzpatricks had only lately taken the pretty Moat House, and they did not know the Waycotts nor the twins. She had not been at the Meet but had found the hunt later on, so the sight of her rescuers delighted her, and made her almost forget the pain in her head and her ankle.

It was not difficult to mount Punch, and she was indeed thankful, for she felt she could not have walked home. Francis rode on towards the Moat House, which soon came in sight, and both boys in the pleasure of their adventure forgot all about Jim and the hunt.

CHAPTER X.

A SWOONING LADY.

WHERE was the faithful Jim? When the hunt had suddenly doubled back and encountered the two jolly but diminutive huntsmen and himself, he found himself jammed in the gate among a crowd of horsemen, and Nimrod began plunging and struggling to disengage himself from the mad onrush that now took place. The hounds that rushed past them with ears erect and rising bristles were level in size and the second whip had them well in hand.

"There's a fox in that copse!" cried a voice. "Look at those hounds, how keen they are." Then a "Hallo!" rang through the air, and the hounds could be seen pouring like a dam let loose over a stake-bound fence which crested the neighbouring hillside.

Jim at last disentangled himself and galloped forward, vexed at having lost sight of the twins. He looked this way and that: they were not in sight. A cold perspiration broke out over his

forehead. How had he missed them? The hounds were doubling back again: which way had they gone? At this moment the party hit off the scent and the hunt were soon cantering down the hill.

Jim gazed with wide-open eyes at the gallant hunters as they swept by him: stained red coats, booted gentlemen, ladies thin and ladies stout, all a little dishevelled; but where were his twins? "Good Gawd!" muttered Jim. "Where are they?" He knew it was not his fault, but why on earth hadn't they waited for him? Had an accident happened? He stopped a heavy yeoman, who was galloping in a rocking-horse kind of way on a great beast, and asked if he had seen the little Waycotts.

"Saw them, bless you, yes—with a telescope! But not since we doubled back at the field a mile away. Lost 'em? They ain't the fox, anyways. Hark! Here comes the hounds, and, bless my soul, I saw the fox!"

The Master of the Hounds came charging at a fearful pace, gaining slightly upon the party, and, making a dash at a staked hedge, he cleared it with a tremendous effort, but came rolling man and horse into Jim's field. Jim was by his side in a moment, but not before the Master was in his saddle again.

"Beg your pardon, sir—but the little Waycott boys—have you seen them?"

"Why, yes, they kept up like Trojans, but disappeared near Jock's Clump. Had enough of it, I expect. Awfully plucky little chaps, tell their mother."

Jim turned and raced to the spot indicated, and, as chance would have it, he cleared the hedge close to the place where the boys had jumped and had paused to help the distressed lady. Jim noticed the ground and the small hoof-marks of the ponies, so he got down and examined the spot. Here some one had evidently fallen. There were signs of a struggle. The ponies had stopped here and had turned round and round. Had one of them fallen? Jim's face turned ashy grey. Holding Nimrod's bridle he walked on and found the traces of the ponies farther on. They went across the field to the gate. Here was the high road. He paused distracted. Not a huntsman was in sight: the field had swept off—but where were the boys?

Afterwards, in the stable, Jim told this part of the tale with great effect.

"I stood by Nimrod, who was trembling with excitement but seemed to know what we had lost, and I looked down, and I looked up. I thought, 'Shall I go that way, or the other,' when, after living ten years in three minutes, I heard gentle trotting, and, as I could swear to Punch and Judy's steps, my heart beat again. 'For what we are going to receive,' I says, and I shouted, 'Tally Ho!'

Thank God, I saw the two come trotting towards me, cool as cucumbers, and I counted their legs and arms just to make sure they had 'em all, and they waved their whip hands at me, not guessing what I'd been feeling, bless 'em. But there, I didn't care—I couldn't nohow have gone back without them."

"Oh, our Jim!" exclaimed Louis. "You forsook us, and we've been so very busy."

"Why didn't you wait for me, Master Louis? I've gone through a bad time."

"So have we, Jim!" said Francis.

"We had to follow because Punch and Judy wouldn't stop, you know, and when we looked about you weren't there, and then—oh, Jim, we'll tell you because you're a country gentleman too—we found a lady swooning, and we took her home."

Jim, much accustomed to the make-believes of the twins, didn't believe a word of the story.

"Did you, sir? Well, it's about time we went home. You'll want a bit of lunch, but you had the sandwiches."

"No, Jim: the lady was starving, so we gave them to her. It was our duty."

Jim wasn't listening.

"Well, come along to 'The Checkers,' and take some hot tea and a bite."

"We will, Jim; but, Jim, you'll not tell, will you? because it isn't honourable."

"Well, sir, I always tell Mrs. Waycott everything; but all's well that ends well, as they say."

By the time the three had refreshed themselves at "The Checkers" and were riding back to the village inn three miles away to pick up the motor-car, the boys were rather quiet and sleepy. But their heads were filled with unutterable joy.

"Oh, Jim, were you in at the death?"

"No, Master Louis; I was looking for you."

"We weren't either, but we don't mind a bit. Francis said he did not want to see the fox killed, and we had our duty to do."

"Jim, what is your favourite name for a lady?"

"Don't exactly know, sir." He would have liked to say "Antonia," but this wasn't respectful.

"Ours is Mary. It's a beautiful name, isn't it Jim?" questioned Louis.

"And our favourite surname is Fitzpatrick."

"There's some as I like better nor that, sir."

"We've got a reason, Jim, but it's a secret. Oh, Jim, it's just a lovely day we've had."

In the motor-car that whizzed home under Jim's guidance there were two perfectly happy but sound asleep huntsmen. Happily for their self-respect they woke up just in time to see the park gates thrown open by some school children, and to pull themselves together before they jumped out and rushed into the Hall.

"Pupsey! Mumsey! How's Aunt Honoria?"

"Oh, my blesseds, much better. And have you had a fine time?"

Mr. Waycott looked his sons up and down.

"Have you rolled in the mud?—for you are two masses of mud!"

"We didn't fall, Mumsey, of course; and we had a lovely water jump, and Punch and Judy were awfully good."

"We didn't come in at the death, Mumsey, but we didn't mind," added Francis.

Jim came forward, looking rather crestfallen.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Waycott, that I lost the young gentlemen——"

"Oh, Jim! How could you?" said Toney, smiling.

"It wasn't our Jim's fault, Mumsey," said Francis. "We got all mixed up, and then we looked for each other, and then we jumped a ditch, and Punch and Judy did do it lovely, and then we——"

"Well, never mind. Here you are safe and sound. Go up and let Rosa get you clean and rested before tea. I expect you're jolly tired."

"We're jolly happy," sighed Louis, and then they disappeared.

"They rode beautifully, sir," added Jim. "The master sent word of it to you, sir, and everybody noticed them; and it was wonderful to see the

ponies, ma'am—they have the spirit of any big hunters."

"I should have liked to have seen them, Jim. Don't worry about losing the boys. I told the Squire they would stick on like leeches." Jim disappeared, still looking sad, and Mr. Waycott turned towards his wife.

"I can't think why Jim didn't keep an eye on them."

"I think there's something more underneath this story," laughed Toney; "but all's well that ends well, and Aunt Honoria is out of danger, and there's sunshine again! It's awfully bad of us to be anxious, isn't it? And won't Uncle Evas be mad about not having gone! I wonder if it's scarlet fever really, or Aunt Dove's scarlet fever! And now I must go to meet my chum and the piccaninnies in the motor, and to-morrow we shall have to make our visitors happy. People always enjoy staying here, Lewis, because they can do as they like!"

Upstairs the twins were regaling Rosa about their hunting.

"You forget the fox, Rosa; you just fly over everything. It's too beautiful," said Louis.

"And, oh, Rosa, you see all the creatures so happy, and you hear everything out of doors sir ging for joy," added Francis.

"You didn't hear the fox singing did you,

Francis ? " said Louis, earnestly. Francis' musical ears were such a marvel to him !

" No," said Francis, reluctantly ; " he doesn't sing: he just wonders when he's running why the other things are singing."

" But he's given us country gentlemen a lot of pleasure ! He's glad about that, isn't he ? "

" I don't know," answered Francis thoughtfully.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FABER FAMILY.

Toney had never left off dashing up to a station, whether she was driving a motor or a carriage and pair. The county ladies had remarked in her hearing that it was like a "bounder" to dash up to public places, and Toney had only laughed as she repeated it to her husband.

"They will forget that I was only just a poor doctor's daughter and not any lady in particular, so of course 'bounding about' comes natural to me, Lewis. I hope you don't mind what they say?"

"Good Lord, no! Truth is, Toney, they can't do it gracefully themselves, so they're jealous!"

To-day her heart was so full of thankfulness that she dashed up to the station with more speed than usual, for Dr. Latham said Miss Waycott's bad attack had passed off, but Toney had done quite right in at once sending for him, as otherwise it might have been serious.

Lewis had sat some time with his aunt, talking of

old days, and that had given her much pleasure. That had more than repaid Toney's disappointment about the hunting, and the boys had returned with much mud but no broken bones. Now she was going to meet her chum.

If you looked for changes you certainly found them more in Mrs. Faber—once the downtrodden companion of Lady Dove—than in Toney.

When the train slowed down, Mrs. Faber's sweet pink-and-white face looked out eagerly for her hostess. The frightened look had quite disappeared from her countenance ; she no longer expected to be snubbed, and in her neighbourhood she had become, from sheer goodness and usefulness, and above all simplicity, some one of importance, and a welcome guest at all the big houses round about.

Her husband had also made his way among his people and was much loved, and her eldest son Harry was on the road to fame. Toney had put him to a good school, and from there he had won a scholarship to Winchester, and, owing to the possession of an extraordinary mathematical brain, he had swept all before him. As a Winchester scholar he was doing really good work, and was certain of a scholarship at New. Anne Faber was of course immensely proud of her son, but she managed to conceal her feelings in public. Toney-two was also a girl that did credit to her godmother. Toney had seen after her education in riding, driving, and useful arts,

and the girl had taken up domestic work and was sure of soon getting a post as a county council teacher at school. Toney had never allowed her god-daughter to dream of idleness, and Toney-two had learnt that what most pleased her parents and her godmother was hard work and sticking to it. Mrs. Waycott had also supplied the good times for the Fabers. Every year she ordered them abroad, and treated them for a month. In this way Toney-two had imbibed all sorts of knowledge. She could talk French and Italian fluently, and she was now a young lady of sixteen who could mix in any society without being shy or awkward, and yet she never pretended to be anything more than her father's daughter. The two younger ones were at present mere pickles, and as such a joy to Toney.

A rush and frantic greetings, and then all the Fabers were being marshalled out of the station.

"Come along, you dears. Oh, chum, you're coming in for some fun! Toney-two, you've got to be very useful, I can tell you. Harry, help Jim to disentangle your luggage."

"Who is coming?" asked Mrs. Faber, squeezing Toney's hand as they all squashed into the motor.

"Why, the great musician, Frank Weston, and Jeanie, and the Hon. Edward, and Maud; and the twins are preparing the entertainment, and I mean to enjoy myself! Oh, Toney-two, the twins went out hunting to-day, and they feel quite awfully

proud of being mighty hunters. A man who was there saw Lewis and told him the boys were the admiration of the field because of their pluck and their ponies. They are thoroughbred, I know; I did have a trouble to find them!"

The library looked more lovely than usual in the spring gloaming, with the last gleam of the afterglow shining upon all the happy faces round the big tea-table placed in the bay window. The twins were doing the honours, but they felt rather sleepy if they sat still too long.

"Cousin Anne," said Louis, "I hope you'll stay a long, long time, for we have lots to tell you, haven't we, Francis?"

"We have two new societies, and Harry may join both, but no women are allowed to belong to them."

"What are they, dear? Why are we poor women left out?" said Mrs. Faber. She loved Toney's children nearly as much as her own.

"The 'Society of the Country Gentlemen.' You can't be that, you see, and the other is 'The Troubadours,' and you can't join that."

"And now," said Toney, the 'country gentlemen' are soon going to retire to rest. Mr. Russell, don't you agree with me that rest after hunting is a necessity?"

"Oh, but——" began Louis; however, a look from his father stopped him, for "Oh, buts" were forbidden.

"I forgot, Pupsey; it just jumped out. Cousin Anne, Pupsey says the O'Buts are always turned out of the regiment. Isn't he funny?"

The two sleepy heads were inspected by their parents late that evening as they came on tiptoe to their room. Evidently the day's hunting had not hurt them, and Toney and Lewis retired smiling.

"Oh, Lewis, I do hope our boys will grow up good men and true," she said, looking out on the moonlit park.

"We'll do our best, my Toney; but I must say bringing up two such boys is no sinecure."

"But you never shirk your duties. Louis was a darling to-night over going to bed. Just your look was enough."

"You have managed to teach them obedience, darling, so it's easy for me."

"I don't want to spoil them, but I find it very hard."

Before their parents thought of getting up the twins were wide awake.

"Louis, are you awake?"

"I should just think so! Oh, Francis! you've got it."

"I've found what's right for one lady, Louis; and listen: 'I can extol her as she deserves without publishing the object of my love. I can aver she is the most beautiful lady in the universe.'"

Louis nodded.

"Isn't that lovely? They always have to say their special lady was the most beautiful, even if she wasn't, you know, Francis."

"She was to them; but Mary Fitzpatrick is beautiful, don't you think?"

"Yes, awfully. Francis, where's yours?"

"Here," said Francis, diving under his pillow. He brought forth a brown dog-skin gauntlet glove. They had begged Miss Fitzpatrick to give them the gloves, and she had willingly granted their request, quite ignorant of the meaning.

"Mine's the right hand," said Louis, "because I'm the eldest."

"I like the left best," retorted Francis; "she gave me the left hand to get up with. Now. Louis, take the book and find about Cœur de Lion for the play. It will be beautiful; I shall be Blodin because I can play the tunes." And for the next half-hour they were blissfully happy in composing their play.

"John and James must be our knights, and then I'll compose a new song for it."

"Do you think Planty would join us, only he is so tall?" said Louis, thoughtfully.

"If he did he must be a knight lying down asleep, and then he wouldn't look tall."

"But I've got an idea," and the two again put their heads together in consultation.

The breakfast this morning was a very joyous meal. Miss Honoria had had a good night, and

Toney loved to see all the young faces round her and her dear chum looking so happy. The twins were plied with questions about the hunting, but answered very discreetly.

"Punch and Judy will want a day's rest," said Toney.

"Mumsey, mayn't John and James ride the ponies quietly round the park?" asked Louis. "We'll walk down to the Vicarage to ask Miss Sylvia to come and see the acting, and may we go alone?"

"But, of course, I've asked her already, dear, only you can repeat it, if you like."

John and James looked eagerly at Toney.

"Oh, may we ride? We'll go very quietly."

Toney thought that her sons were very unselfish, and said "Yes," and Mrs. Faber murmured that her boys could walk quite well, but the twins insisted. So it happened that after lessons with Mr. Russell the twins walked off alone with great importance to the Vicarage.

It happened that Sylvia Hales was in the greenhouse tending her flowers. She looked very dainty and pretty, though sad and discontented, as she picked off dead stalks and arranged the pots. Her mind was always reverting to the might-have-been if . . . even though she knew that her faithless lover was enjoying life and his wife's fortune without a thought of her. Hearing the click of the

garden gate she looked up and saw the twins walking very solemnly side by side up the drive, so she went out to greet them.

"How do you do, Louis and Francis? I am sorry the Vicar is out; I expect you bring some message for him."

"No, Miss Sylvia, we don't. We want only you," said Louis solemnly.

Now it's very nice to be wanted, even by small boys, and Sylvia smiled her sweetest.

"It's very good of you to want me. What can I do for you?"

The brothers looked at each other, then Francis spoke as he brought out a glove from his breast pocket.

"Miss Sylvia, have you got a glove something like this—an old one, you don't want?"

"Are you going to act charades?" asked Sylvia innocently. "I just happen to have a pair of old garden gloves here."

"It's only one, Miss Sylvia—an odd one would do."

Sylvia laughed.

"You are very economical. Here is an odd one, as it happens; I was going to throw it away." The brothers nodded, and Louis took the glove and examined it.

"There's my name in it; will that matter?" said Sylvia.

Louis read it carefully, "Sylvia Hales," in big letters.

"That's beautiful," said Francis.

"You're welcome to it, I'm sure. Come and have some lunch."

"No, thank you, we're in a great hurry; John and James are riding Punch and Judy and they'll soon be in again; you know they are our guests."

"The little Fabers are about your age, aren't they?"

"One is, and the other isn't. You see, we're twins, so we're just the same age, at least not quite because I'm the eldest, but Francis doesn't mind."

Sylvia smiled.

"How did the hunting go off?"

"Oh, it was scrumptious. Punch and Judy kept up with the big hunters. They are so brave, and won't be beaten."

"If they were tired they wouldn't show it."

"Mother says they're like Christians, who are always cheerful. She's got a text in her bedroom with 'Rejoice always' on it. Have you, Miss Sylvia?"

"No," said Sylvia, "I haven't."

When the boys had walked off, keeping step like two soldiers, Sylvia looked after them and thought, "It's all very well for Toney, who has everything she wants, to have that text, but I have nothing nice—I can't rejoice."

CHAPTER XII.

HIS LADY'S GLOVE.

"Isn't it lovely, Francis! We've got it for Planty. How happy he will be!"

"I wonder if he can put it near his heart."

"It would make his waistcoat bulge," said Louis, thoughtfully, "and Planty wouldn't like that. He's rather particular about his clothes, isn't he?"

"But troubadours mustn't think about themselves. Oh, Louis, look there!" The boys had reached the lodge gates of Waycott Park, and seated on an old pony, and walking a foot's pace, was Miss Mary Fitzpatrick.

The boys flew to open the gates before the lodge-keeper could do so. Miss Fitzpatrick smiled.

"Well, that is luck to meet my rescuers! I was determined to come to thank you in person."

"It's very, very good of you," said Francis fervently.

"Will you do us a great favour?" said Louis.

"You deserve a handsome reward, mother says."

"Oh, no! we don't do anything for rewards, but if you please don't tell mother that we rescued you."

"I was just coming to tell her what very jolly little chaps you were, and how I might have died in the ditch but for you."

The boys were much delighted at the last part of the sentence, but the first was not to their liking.

"You know, Lady Mary, that we are troubadours; I don't think they are ever called 'little chaps' in our book," said Louis with dignity.

"Oh, I forgot! Of course. Well, dear troubadours, it would give me great pleasure to tell your parents."

Francis shook his head.

"If you please we would rather it was a deep secret till we have done something really grand for you."

Mary Fitzpatrick could not help laughing softly, but she saw she must play the game in earnest to please these extraordinary twins!

"Very well, I will do as you ask, my troubadours, so I must ride home again. I hope you'll come to see me; but Mrs. Waycott has not yet called on us, so I can't come without an excuse."

"Of course she will," said Louis, "we'll ask her. We learnt a bit out of our book to tell you this morning. (Can you remember the beginning, Francis?)"

Francis nodded.

"'Among a thousand flowers in a big——'"

"No, 'spacious.'"

"'In a spacious garden I have chosen the fairest.'"

"'I weep for joy, but in my song only I dare make known my love.'"

Mary Fitzpatrick fairly turned away, but recovered quickly.

"Good-bye, troubadours. That is awfully pretty. I shall have great difficulty to live up to your opinion of me. My foot's much better, you will be glad to hear."

"Do you want to get down?" asked Louis, "because Francis and I could hold your stirrup, and get you up again. It's part of our duty."

"Perhaps you'll let me off this time; good-bye," and Mary whipped up her old pony and was soon disappearing round the corner.

The boys watched her retreating form.

"She's bending right down on the pony's neck, Francis."

"I wonder why? Now we must just run quick home."

The twins had inherited their mother's talent for running, and very soon they were in the pleasant schoolroom waiting for John and James to return. Mr. Russell looked in for a few moments.

"Your 'prep' must be done after lunch, boys."

As both of them liked their lessons, Mr. Russell never had to urge on unwilling pupils. He was just going out of the room when the twins stood to attention.

"Please, Planty."

"Well, what's the trouble?"

"Oh, it's no trouble; it's a lovely, lovely thing for you, Planty!"

"For me?"

"Yes," said Louis, pulling an old leather dog-skin garden glove out of his pocket and putting it into the tutor's hands.

"Oh, Planty, we've got it for you! Your lady's glove,"

Mr. Russell felt as if his hair was standing on end.

"Oh, you shouldn't—er—steal a lady's gloves, Louis."

Four distressed eyes rebuked him.

"I mean——"

"Oh, Planty, she gave it; isn't it wonderful?" said Louis.

"Where will you wear it?" added Francis.

"It must be near your heart."

"If that makes your waistcoat too bulgy, I think you *may* put it in another pocket."

"And you'll keep it always, always, Planty, till she asks you for it."

"And if she wants you to do anything, you

will have to, even if it's very, very difficult and disagreeable."

"Isn't it a lovely society, Planty, and aren't you glad you joined?"

"Troubadour William said: 'Ah, madam, since that happy moment I entered your service I have always been charmed with your goodness.'"

"'And the truth of your behaviour towards me.'"

"And Marguerite says—that might be Miss Sylvia, you know—'I swear to thee that never, no never, will I deceive thee.'"

Plantagenet Russell stood speechless before his pupils, trying to gain time.

"You are happy, Planty, aren't you?" said Louis, breaking off in breathless expectation.

"Oh, yes, yes, of course—very. It's a—quite a nice game."

"It's more than a game, Planty, it's *our* society. Now you've got a lady-love, and so have we, but it's a secret; but we are rather puzzled about Gan-Uncle Evas. He is quite the right sort, Mumsey says, but having got Gan-Aunt Dove makes it more difficult. I don't think wives counted much with the troubadours."

"Oh, but in this case I think it would count," said Mr. Russell hastily, fearing that Lady Dove might hear strange news of her husband.

"We'll think it out, Planty."

"Your 'prep' musn't be forgotten. Ah! there are the Faber boys."

"I suppose we must let them into the society, too, but it's rather hard work, Planty, finding ladies for everybody."

As the Fabers rushed in, Mr. Russell rushed out; but when he entered his own study he still found himself clutching Sylvia's garden glove. He held it gingerly by the fingers; where on earth could he put it? If he threw it away, he would have to tell the twins he had lost it, and he positively could not tell them a lie of any colour, and if he did they would find him out. He might, of course, hide it behind a book, but the housemaid would certainly find it and bring it back to him. Never before had a knight found his lady-love's token so much *de trop!* At that moment the footman brought in the midday post, and in despair Mr. Russell thrust the glove deep down into his coat pocket, exactly where he had determined not to put it.

In the schoolroom no such terrible deliberations took place.

John and James were clever and sharp, but quite unimaginative little boys; still, perhaps that was the reason they got on perfectly with the twins, for they were naturally leaders of men, and the Fabers were quite ready to follow them.

Louis sat on the top of a sofa and expounded what his company was to do that evening to enter-

tain the guests, and Toney-two and Harry were there also to hear what parts were assigned to them.

"I'm afraid I must be Richard Cœur de Lion," said Louis, "because Francis must be Blondin—he's the only one who can play the violin. We'll half say it and half act it, because we haven't quite enough people. Harry, you must be the Duke of Austria, and Henry the Sixth, Emperor of Suabia, and Tancred, and anyone else we want. Richard was a troubadour, so Toney-two must be his lady-love; she is called Countess of Soir; it's all in our book of troubadours. And now we'll make the story up and, Harry, will you please write it down, and in between we'll say anything we like out of our heads."

It was wonderful how little was heard of the schoolroom party that afternoon; and Toney and Mrs. Faber enjoyed walking about the village, and having a good chat over old days, and over the doings and sayings of their respective children.

"The twins are sweeter than ever, Toney," said Mrs. Faber, with shining eyes.

"I don't know about sweeter, dear Chum; they're frightfully clever, and make my heart jump into my mouth often; still they mean well, I'm sure."

"That's all that matters, isn't it? Now, John and James so often don't mean well. They don't seem to be a bit like our children. Dear Henry

has to punish them often, and that grieves him so much."

Toney smiled.

"School will tame them soon enough. Oh, Chum! just imagine, Aunt Dove has taken a fancy to Louis and thinks he can do no wrong! It's wonderful; that child may say anything to her. Do you remember——"

"Oh, I shall never feel at my ease with her!"

"And whatever I do is still wrong," added Toney, shaking her head; and then both laughed merrily because the sayings and doings of Lady Dove were no longer able to hurt them.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STORY OPENS.

Mrs. Waycott felt as if she wanted six pairs of hands, for though they were going to dine quietly with only the house party, she had scattered invitations right and left for coffee afterwards, because, besides the children's entertainment, there was a chance of the great Frank Weston playing for her Stone House friends. All Stone House that could come were coming; the Hon. Edward Lang and his wife, too, would be there, and Toney's dinner-table must look nice for her dear friends. Happily, Mrs. Faber's fingers were willing; and as Harry and Toney-two were looking after the schoolroom party, Mr. Russell was able to finish his letters in peace before having to make his appearance at dinner. He had offered to look after the children's supper, but Toney would not hear of it. Harry was a prefect at Winchester, and as such qualified to keep order; besides, Toney-two had a genius for children.

To himself Mr. Russell said it wanted a lot of

qualifications to be even with the twins, but he dismissed them from his mind till it was time to dress for dinner. It was then, poor man, that he put his hand into his pocket and, feeling something strange, drew out Sylvia's glove! Good heavens! what should he do with it? If he left it there, the footman who brushed his coat would discover it; then being pressed for time he again did what he certainly never meant to do—he stuffed it into an inner pocket of his dress suit.

Toney and Cousin Anne, as everybody now called Mrs. Faber, as well as the twins, were in the hall to receive the new arrivals. The Westons came first, and no one could have recognized Jeanie Hamilton in the stately, smiling Mrs. Weston, beautifully dressed and looking exceedingly handsome. Frank, outwardly, was not altered at all, except that he relied on his wife for everything mundane; he was still the same great-minded, simple musical genius as of old, but his wife had made his life a thing of beauty. In working for him Jeanie had found her vocation and her happiness, but it was certainly hard work to be always flying from one European capital to another, varied by an occasional run over to America. There was but one great drawback to the life, and this was that Maud Antonia, their daughter, could not lead the same existence, so her Aunt Maud had charge of her, and she ran the chance of being more spoilt even than her little cousin

Eddie. Jeanie's laugh was pure joy to hear as she greeted and kissed Toney, her husband, and the twins, as well as the Faber family.

"It is nice to be here again! We came from Rome yesterday. Oh, Toney, you should have heard how they received Frank! A regular furore!"

"You look very fit, my dear coz," said the Squire. "Your mother is coming to dinner, so we shall be *en famille*. Aunt Honoria is better, and means to come down to dine with us."

"Which of these two is my godson?" asked Frank Weston, looking at the twins, and unable to choose the right one.

"That's Francis," said Louis; "he's been awfully busy composing some music for you, Cousin Frank."

"You'll hear it to-night," exclaimed Francis, looking at the great musician with unbounded respect.

"That's good news."

"We've lots to say to you to-morrow," added Louis, "but we must go now because we've promised mother to give you an entertainment."

"You see, Frank, you're not the only entertainer," remarked the Squire; "my sons have begun early!"

They all laughed, and asked if Maud Antonia, who was coming later with Maud, showed signs of genius, but both parents shook their heads.

"She's only pretty," said Jeanie.

"Only lovely," added Frank, "and good; I don't want any more of her!"

Soon after the motor-car arrived, bringing Maud Lang and her husband; and Lewis declared that as Babel was let loose he would depart to write his letters.

"Oh, Toney!" exclaimed Maud, who was a constant visitor at Waycott Hall, "how do you think Edward looks? He's working so hard and won't believe it when I tell him I don't want to be rich."

"There are no signs of poverty about you both, anyhow! Lady Southbourne says her son can't be recognized," answered Toney.

The Hon. Edward was no longer the irresponsible idler of old days. He often blessed Toney for having refused him.

"Maud converted me, and now she is sorry she can't stop the conversion!" he said, laughing. "But she expects her son Eddie to have everything of the best, because Maud Antonia has it."

Toney shook her head.

"You all forget the simple life! Now, Cousin Anne is the only one of you who realizes that style of living," said Toney; and then they all turned towards Cousin Anne.

"We're jealous of you," exclaimed Jeanie; "but if you had to rush round the world as we do you would have to travel first-class or succumb.

Frank never knows if he's in luxury or not ! " And Maud added :

" And Edward is secretary to a big-wig and he says I must keep up appearances."

" You don't do it badly either," Edward added, looking at his wife with pride ; but Toney knew that Maud Lang, inwardly if not outwardly, lived the simple life. Society never talked scandal in her hearing, and where she went peace seemed to reign. As to betting and gambling, her husband had long ago renounced all such works.

" Let's all go and rest till dinner, and prepare for the twins' entertainment. I am not in the secret, but I guess it will be fine, for they are dark on it. And later Frank will play—won't you ?—for my Stone Housers ? They'll burst with pride."

" And I'll play for them too, and I'm a rarity, for I never play in public ! " said Jeanie.

Then as they all melted away, Anne Faber retired to her room and thought of the past.

" It was all Toney's doing," she thought, " and we were all transformed by her—and I don't believe she realizes it in the least." Then as she dressed for dinner she counted her own blessings, and a happy smile played round her lips. She could never forget what she owed to the girl who had transformed her life.

Mrs. Hamilton appeared in time for dinner, Toney having sent the motor for her. She was

living in the farm Toney had vacated when Stone House was built, and which Lewis had lent to his aunt. She and the Vicar made great friends over parish work; but the Ethiopian had not changed his skin, and Toney still often thought of her as "the old pussy cat." Her daughters were very good to her, and she lived in comfort, but she no longer influenced them.

No sad recollections, however, marred the joyous dinner party, which reminded one more of a French meal *en famille* than a sober English party. Everybody talked and exchanged experiences; only Mr. Russell, sitting next to Mrs. Faber, enjoyed himself soberly; indeed, he had much to think about and was painfully conscious of a dog-skin glove in his pocket. If he could have swallowed it without dire effects he would gladly have done so.

"The twins are more charming than ever," said Cousin Anne, looking at him. "You do manage them beautifully! Now John and James are almost beyond me."

"Yes, the twins are quite charming," he assented, "but not always quite easy to manage."

"They think a great deal of you, Mr. Russell. I heard Louis saying to James: 'Planty'—that's your pet name, I suppose—'Planty is one of us.' Wasn't that sweet?"

Planty inwardly groaned. "One of us" meant that he was a troubadour!

"It's only one of their little games, Mrs. Faber. I wonder what their play will be like to-night? I am glad to say it's historical."

He thought of his last historical lessons and wondered which of them the twins were going to dramatize. Anyhow, he had not mentioned the word "troubadours" in any lesson—that was one good thing.

When at last Toney jumped up and led the way to the smaller drawing-room, the doors of the big one being firmly shut, the visitors could read the notice in big, round text-hand:

"Doors will open soon."

Toney hoped they would, for the smaller room was already filled with a heterogeneous crew of guests, of whom the first to greet her was Sir Evas.

"Oh, you dear! So I see it's not scarlet fever, or you wouldn't be here."

"Well, no, Toney, it's only a sore throat, but of course, it *might* have been."

"Only too glad that it wasn't! Now, make yourself useful. My dear Stone people are all here, and lots more; and, oh! dear Uncle, hook on to Mrs. Hamilton a bit; she patronizes my folks so much it makes me squirm. And just squint at Jeanie and Maud; aren't they the loveliest women you ever saw? And, oh! ducky Uncle, there's Sylvia Hales, please get her a chair next to Mr. Russell."

Then Toney was off round the room with a greet-

ing to each guest—not as if she had to do it but as if she really cared for each individual. Every one felt at home at Waycott Hall and specially wanted, even the most prim of the Stone Housers.

At last there was heard a rush, and the doors of the big drawing-room were thrown open.

The other end had been made into a wonderful stage, but the curtains were not drawn till everybody was seated ; then soft music was heard, and Harry Faber revealed the stage. The scene that met the eye was truly wonderful. What was evidently a tower had been built up of chairs on a stout oak table. A forest was represented by a plentiful supply of fir branches, and laurels were strewn on the platform. Here was evidently far more than Shakespeare's company provided to announce to the spectators that they must think of a castle in a lonely wood. Plaintive music continued though nothing was seen. The company were on the tip-toe of expectation, except Frank Weston, who touched Toney's arm.

" Toney, who is that playing ? "

" Why, your godson of course ! He is our only musician."

Frank stared at Toney, she spoke so unconcernedly. Mr. Russell, seated close behind them, found himself by the side of Sylvia Hales. He would have moved, but found it impossible.

The music increased and suddenly the stage was

filled with gay lords and two ladies. Their trailing dresses and beautiful ornaments made two or three mothers present shudder as they recognized their own treasures.

The little party divided, and from behind the castle appeared a kingly figure. The lords and ladies all fell on their faces, and the one musician played on with surprising energy.

"We greet you, Richard, Count of Poitou!" said three actors who came forward, headed by Francis.

"Hail! noble Count, we are your troubadours, Bertram de Born, Chail Pensavin, and Blondel de Nesle."

Mr. Russell looked round furtively. Sylvia was smiling: did she know, did she guess where her glove was? Oh, those troubadours again!

One of the two ladies now swept towards the Count, making a profound curtsy.

"Dear Richard, I am your lady-love, Countess of Soir."

"Sweet lady," answered Richard, "whom I adore, the love of such a lady shall excite my courage."

Blondel here came forward; his minstrel's dress was somewhat composite, but the feathered cap and jaunty cloak on one shoulder made Francis look quite delightful as, playing on his violin and casting his eyes towards Richard, he said:

"Sweet master, your troubadour, who loves you

more than his own life, bids you command him. Will you have a song without words, or will you dance with your lady-love ? "

" Dear friends," said Richard, " I love you all very much. I am going to the Holy Land as a true knight must. Philip Augustus shall not have all the glory. But before I go my merry court shll enjoy itself. I think we'll dance all. Music, oh, music ! Minstrel ; I will dance with my lady-love." The violin broke into a dance and all the court danced with right good will before the curtain came down, and continuous applause followed.

CHAPTER XIV.

A GENIUS.

If the burst of applause was mingled with much laughter the players did not heed this, they were in too great earnest.

"It's the story of Richard Cœur de Lion," said Mr. Russell, feeling desperate and turning towards Sylvia. "They have been reading that part of history lately."

"It's so funny!" she said. "Don't you think so, Mr. Russell?" Her blue eyes were lifted to his face, but he avoided the subject of troubadours and the colour of eyes. Funny? Oh, no, he did not think it funny at all, but he dared not say so.

Soon after the curtain was drawn back hurriedly, and Harry came forward in gorgeous robes.

"I am the Emperor Henry VI, and now I have taken my enemy from Leopold, Duke of Austria. He is my prisoner in this Castle of Triefels. He is there," pointing to the erection, "and there he will stay for ever."

The Emperor shook his fist at the pyramid of chairs as he went away, when suddenly from a gap in the erection came forth Richard's head.

"I am quite forsaken! Where are my dear troubadours? Where is my lady-love? Alack, alack!"

Roars of laughter greeted this appeal, but presently a small table of glasses and a jug of beer were brought on the stage by two serving-maids.

"This is the 'Golden Crown,' and Mine Host tells us always to have beer ready for any visitors who may come. Let's dance now our work is done."

So Toney-two and Maud Antonia danced a really pretty dance, soft music coming from behind the scenes. After this was finished Blondel and Mine Host came slowly forward.

"What a sad, dark forest; I have wandered many days here, O Mine Host."

"Aye, Troubadour, and yonder is the terrible castle. Take care you don't get into that place! You would never get out again."

"What do you call it, and are there any prisoners there?"

"It is called the Castle of Triefels. There is one prisoner there, but we never speak of him."

"Oh, tell me his name, good Innkeeper; if you do I will give you this handful of money."

Mine Host clutched at the money eagerly.

"Thank you, kind Troubadour, I will tell you all I know; but no one knows his name!"

"Who is there?" (Blondel beats his chest.) "My heart tells me it is Richard. O my king! Speak, Innkeeper."

"We carry food to the castle, but we never get in. It is a dreadful place! All is black, even at noonday. A torch is needed to see anything."

"Then you have not seen his face?"

"Once, Troubadour, I saw him put his head out of that window, but after that they made an iron bar."

"I, too, will watch; leave me alone!"

Exeunt the maids and Mine Host carrying the table.

"My master, he is there! How shall I tell him I am here? Ah! I have it. Listen, O master, to the song you and I composed long ago in France."

Francis played his violin in such a plaintive style that no one wished to laugh.

Presently Richard's head is seen trying to come from between the bars of a chair, and he takes up the tune—only, as Louis could sing no tune he loudly shouted some imaginary notes.

"It is my master, my king! Wait a bit, dear lord, I'm coming. I will bribe thy keeper, or kill him. I will become thy serving-man! I will find thee! I am thy troubadour, Blondel de Nesle."

The little violin again did double duty, and the

curtain came down amidst the loud cheers of the company: cheers again mingled with somewhat immoderate laughter.

They were not long kept waiting for the third act.

Richard, as King of England, is now in all his splendour at the court, and his troubadours are there, as well as the two ladies, and Francis as Blondel is found kneeling before his master.

"Richard, thy faithful troubadour has saved thee. The wicked Emperor was obliged to release thee."

They fell into each other's arms. Then the other two troubadours came forward.

"We, thy faithful troubadours, sang thy woes all over Europe, and then every one gave money for thy ransom."

The two ladies came forward.

"All thy lady-loves wept till their king was ransomed. We gave all our jewels."

"Thank you all very much," answered Richard, looking sweetly at his court. "It is all the work of the noble troubadours; and now I will go and fight my wicked enemies. When I was in prison I composed a song. My brothers left me in prison two years, but my troubadours saved me. My subjects forgot me, but Chail Pensavin and Blondel never forget. The Countess of Soir also never forgets, so I promise you no one will every forget any of you! You will all join this noble society

which makes every man think first of his lady-love and of his friends, and last of all of himself. Blondel, will you play in honour of our noble society ? And then we will dance."

There was music and dancing, which the audience accompanied by shouts of laughter, which were renewed as the curtain drew up for the last time and the troubadours made their bows. Louis came forward.

" We're awfully glad you like our play ! And if anyone wants to become a troubadour we'll let him join, but he must promise a lot of things, and also he must find a lady-love to serve. Music ! O music ! "

This was again provided by Francis, and then the curtain hid the fair actors. The servants came to clear away the forest and other properties whilst coffee was handed round. After this the young people retired to their own quarters except Harry and Toney-two, who were ready to answer all the questions put to them.

" Oh, it was altogether the twins' make up," said Harry. " They've got hold of an old book on the troubadours. Don't you know it, Mr. Russell ? "

" No, I don't think I do," answered Mr. Russell, trying to look unconcerned. " Those boys get the most extraordinary ideas into their heads."

Frank Weston came up to Harry.

"Did my godson compose all the music?"

"Oh, yes, I believe so; he says he improvises, but I'm not musical."

"Oh, Frank, isn't it too comical? I shall die of laughing. Poor Uncle Evas says he never heard anything so quaint."

"But the music, Toney, don't you know that Francis has a very uncommon talent?"

"Oh, dear, has he? What a waste of good things! But I'm sure Louis takes after me; he doesn't know one note from another. It's *your* fault for being my poor boy's godfather."

"I must talk to him to-morrow," said Frank rather solemnly; and then he and Jeanie went upstairs to worship at Maud Antonia's shrine.

Toney was busy talking to Captain Grant on her fingers, but presently the curtain was drawn again, and this time Frank Weston was on the stage ready to play his violin. He cared not that his company was very mixed, and that not many geniuses were there to listen. Toney had told him to play, and Toney's commands were law. So the musical guests got a rare treat; and when the evening was over and the motor-car was brought into great request for taking home the guests who had no carriages, every one said "Thank you," from their heart, and not because they had to be civil.

"Thank you so very much, Frank, for playing to my guests," said Toney. "I know it was heavenly.

because what do you think happened ? Lewis went out to give an order, and he found Francis crouching against the door in his nightshirt. 'I couldn't help it, Pupsey, I heard it,' he said, and then he had to be taken back to bed on Lewis' shoulder."

Maud laughed.

"Toney, I'm afraid you really have got a genius in the house!"

"It's not my fault; but, oh! Maud, the twins look so angelic sometimes, I shudder to think what they will be in the future—angelic children always turn out badly!"

CHAPTER XV.

A FAIRY GODMOTHER.

FRANK WESTON was seated on the terrace at Waycott Hall, looking with dreamy eyes over the beautiful view. Opposite to him the twins sat on low chairs, and one of them gazed at him with great reverence.

"You did it all yourself, Francis?" said Mr. Weston. "Who teaches you?"

"I'm learning myself, Godfather, because there's no one at Wycherly now. There used to be a nice old violin-man there, and he came over and taught me, but Mumsey said his brain went wrong."

"But you gave us some very nice music, Francis."

"I heard all Louis told me, and then I thought I was in the forest and my master was lost, and then I heard the song of the lost king and the birds in the forest, and the wind in the trees. Oh! Godfather, it's so beautiful to hear it, isn't it?"

"I can't hear anything," said Louis; "it is a pity Francis has got ears different to mine, he

hears all the things singing, Cousin Frank, and I never do."

"Yes," said Frank Weston, rather sadly, "he hears so much already"; and to himself he added, "and some day his hearing will separate those twins, bless 'em."

"Look here, Francis, bring me your violin and we'll go into the study, and I'll give you a lesson."

"Oh! Godfather, and will you play to me? I got up last night and came and listened, but Pupsey said I must go back to bed. Mumsey says it's a great privilege for us to see you, and speak to you, and it's a tremendous privilege to have you for a godfather."

"I will play something for yourself alone, Francis, and I think it will be a privilege for me."

The two retired to Mr. Waycott's study, and whilst they were transported into another world, Louis sought out John and James and made them listen to his old troubadour book. But he was dealing with other minds than his twin.

"I don't much care about learning your book," said James, "but let's go and act it somewhere. We'll be troubadours doing nice adventures we'll take captives and all that sort of thing. I was scrumptious last night!"

"Let's go down to see Miss Sylvia," said Louis, "and perhaps she'll give us something to do, but

she isn't our lady, only she lives nearer than ours."

"I shouldn't bother about ladies," said John.

Louis shook his head: he must play the game rightly; and presently the three boys were flying towards the village. They met Miss Sylvia just coming out of her gate.

"Oh, Miss Sylvia, we are glad to see you. We want you to give us some adventure to do," said Louis very earnestly.

Sylvia laughed.

"I should have thought you did enough last night. You entertained us extremely well."

"Did we? Well, we are glad! It was all true, you know, Miss Sylvia. Francis and I thought if all the visitors saw it they would want to join but we haven't got any new members yet."

"I'm sure they will join soon," said Sylvia sympathetically.

"What are your commands, noble lady?" asked Louis. "I ought to kneel down, Miss Sylvia, but the road is rather dirty."

"I'll let you off this time. Well, Louis, I wish you *would* do something for me; I want this letter taken to Lady Dove; it's about one of her cottagers, and as she won't be pleased, I prefer to send my letter by you than to take it."

"I quite understand," said Louis gravely. "I will be your messenger, fair lady."

"Thank you so much. Where is Francis?"

"He and his godfather are playing their violins. They hear all sorts of things I can't hear, it is funny; but he'll be sorry to miss this adventure. John and James, you may come with me."

The three boys started off at a brisk trot till they reached the steps of Aldersfield House.

"You boys mustn't come any farther," said Louis. "Lady Dove doesn't like company very much. You can play in the garden; I've got to see my Gan-Aunt alone."

The butler knew his rôle this time, and asked: "Shall I say a gentleman to see Lady Dove, sir?"

"A country gentleman, please."

Lady Dove was sitting in the big drawing-room with her companion Miss Crossman, who had become more and more of a tyrant. But though Sir Evas often suggested sending her away, Lady Dove had a nervous dread of getting some one worse if she parted with this one. So the quarrels continued, and the tyrant stayed. Toney had tried in vain to interfere, but both parties rejected mediation.

Louis walked up to Lady Dove with a courtly air, and made a low bow.

"Good morning, Gan-Aunt Dove, I've come to see you. I bring a letter from Miss Sylvia, and you are, please, to say yes to what she asks. If you like, Miss Crossman can go out for a little walk. I'll take care of you."

"What does Sylvia Hales want now? As you are the messenger I must say yes, I suppose."

There comes a time in our lives when a child's love and sympathy is the greatest flattery we can receive.

"You can go, Crossman," added Lady Dove. "I'm sure I've not understood a word you've been reading; your throat is quite hoarse."

"I suppose you were asleep, Lady Dove," said Miss Crossman tartly. "I always read distinctly. I shall give you half an hour, Louis," she added going away, "and no more."

Louis ran to open the door for her, much to her displeasure.

"Thank you, I can open the door for myself; pray don't disturb yourself."

Louis returned a little crestfallen, and seated himself near Lady Dove.

"Gan-Aunt, Francis is with his godfather. They both have such funny ears; can you believe it?—they hear the trees singing, and the rabbits and hares and the wind and the corn growing; oh! such funny things. Of course it's true, because Francis wouldn't tell a lie for anything."

"Just foolish imagination," said Lady Dove. "I'm glad you are sensible, Louis."

Louis shook his head.

"'Tisn't that, Gan-Aunt, it's something wrong with my ears,; but I want to tell you I'm glad

Uncle Evas and you are my godfather and godmother, because you don't mind about my ears, do you ? "

"I'm glad you are like an ordinary mortal; you're the only one at Waycott that has got common sense."

" It's because you're my godmother. What was *your* godmother like, Gan-Aunt ? "

Lady Dove had almost forgotten that individual.

" Oh, let me see, yes, Lady Cranston was my godmother; she never noticed me at all, and forgot me in her will."

Louis shook his head in sympathy.

" Then she wasn't a nice woman. You won't forget me in yours, will you, Gan-Aunt ? I shan't forget you in mine. We write our wills sometimes, and in my last one I left you my christening cup, what you gave me, you know."

Lady Dove laughed, for all Louis' sayings were very clever in her estimation.

" There's something I wanted to say to you, private; I don't think Miss Crossman is very respectful to you, Gan-Aunt. Do you think I'd better speak to her ? Pupsey says we must always be very respectful to people older than us, so Francis and me we take off our caps much lower for the people that are old, half-way for the middle-age people, and only just touch them for young people."

Again Lady Dove laughed; she quite approved of distinctions and differences of treatment.

"Crossman doesn't understand the difference of my position and hers. She has a ridiculous idea that she is a lady!"

This was past Louis' understanding, so he accepted it in silence.

"I think you're a bit lonely sometimes, Gan-Aunt, aren't you? because you can't run about as we do, so I wanted to tell you that, if you like, you can be my lady-love. We've got another, but I'll give her all up to Francis, and have you instead, only I must have your glove, and then I shall do exactly all your commands. You know, we've got a new society of troubadours as well as country gentlemen. Did Uncle Evas tell you about our acting?"

"Yes, he said you had a very amusing play."

"Me and Francis didn't call it amusing, Gan-Aunt. True things aren't often amusing, but the visitors did laugh a good deal. I suppose they were rather merry after dinner."

"The Langs came to see me, and said you were thorough little gentlemen."

"Did they? Well that was nice of them. That's what we want to be, Gan-Aunt; and if you'll be my lady-love, I don't think Uncle Evas will be jealous, because husbands weren't thought much about in those days."

Lady Dove fairly laughed, and to hear her laughing was a very rare thing indeed.

"Does it amuse you, too, Gan-Aunt? Some of the things the troubadours did were very amusing. One man pretended to be a wolf because his lady was called Wolf. Funny name for a lady! So he put on a wolf's skin, and let the dogs hurt him. He was nearly killed! That was rather silly, we think, but you see what a lot the troubadours would do for their ladies."

"Who ever gave you such a book?" asked Lady Dove, still smiling.

"We got it all by ourselves; and, do you know, Gan-Aunt, I think Mr. Russell wanted to find it too, but he couldn't, for we hid it. Don't tell him."

"Humph! perhaps he wanted——" She paused, she would not damp Louis' ideas.

"Anyway we've found him a lady-love, and he's very, very happy about it. He walks with her secretly, at least he did once; and, oh, Gan-Aunt, there's Miss Crossman coming back, I can't tell secrets before her."

"Is there anything you want, Louis; as I'm your godmother I ought to——"

"Oh, thank you, Gan-Aunt, you're quite a fairy godmother. Well, I should like a little dog, something like Trick—you knew Trick, didn't you? Mumsey says it was a great privilege to know Trick. Well, I want a little dog for Captain Grant. He's

so deaf, you know, and he wants something to love that wouldn't mind about not hearing."

"Oh!" said Lady Dove, "is that all you want?"

"That's all to-day, thank you."

"I'll tell Fuller to find one. As you say, if he barks it won't matter."

"Thank you, thank you so much, Godmother, you're the nicest godmother I know. Now I must go. May I kiss you? John and James Faber are in the garden; I didn't think you'd like a lot of boys bothering you, so I sent them there."

Louis stood on tiptoe and deposited a very gentle kiss on Lady Dove's wrinkled face.

A little warm glow, a reminiscence from old, old days before her crooked temper and jealous disposition had darkened her life, came over the withered heart.

"Good-bye, my boy, come whenever you like; you're always welcome, and it relieves me of Crossman for a little while."

"I will, Gan-Aunt. It's a command when you ask it, of course. Where shall I find a glove? It must be a gauntlet glove."

Lady Dove, smiling, dived into a basket where she kept garden gloves.

"Here's one; but don't make me ridiculous, Louis, by talking."

"Oh, no! it's quite private and confidential, Godmother, between you and me. The troubadours

were very honourable. Romband said: 'I would rather be the lowest slave in the house of Ermengarde than reign over the whole world.'"

Miss Crossman entered; and Louis, bowing to her with dignity, walked to the door.

"Good-bye, Godmother. I'll come again very soon."

CHAPTER XVI.

A RESCUE.

THE brothers had much to say to each other when they met again.

"I've arranged it," exclaimed Francis, "this afternoon all the gentlemen are to meet in the schoolroom."

Louis nodded.

"To explain to them about our troubadours?"

"Yes, Mr. Russell's coming, and James and John and Harry, and perhaps Uncle Evas, and Pupsey and my godfather, and Mr. Lang and perhaps others."

"That's beautiful! I had a nice talk with my godmother, and I've made her my lady-love, Francis, because she's rather lonely, and because Miss Crossman isn't at all respectful to her. You can have Miss Mary Fitzpatrick all to yourself."

"Can you have two ladies, Louis?"

"I think so; they often changed, I know. I don't think Uncle Evas will be jealous, do you, Francis?"

"Mumsey says he's a real saint, and real saints aren't ever jealous."

"Now come and make our rules," and the two brothers retired to a private hiding-place in a loft. This loft was reached through a housemaid's cupboard. If you climbed on to the sink you reached a little ladder, on the top of which rested a trap-door. Pushing it open you entered a big loft, and from one of its windows you could get on to the leads; certainly no better solitary spot could be found. It was cold in winter and hot in summer, but these were very minor details.

Mr. Russell did not follow them to this retreat; indeed, he could not have squeezed himself through the trap-door, had he wished it, without great difficulty; but to-day, when his pupils had done their work, he walked off to try and settle in his own mind how he could stop this new and terrible game of troubadours!

The leather glove was still in his pocket, and the idea that Sylvia Hales knew about it made him turn hot. He was strongly tempted to throw it into a ditch, but her name being written so conspicuously inside the gauntlet, somebody might pick it up and return it to her, and she would think . . . oh, good heavens! what would she think? He crossed the road leading to the village, but fearing he might meet her there, he took a field-path leading to a neighbouring hamlet.

The spring morning was delicious; the primroses were beginning to line the hedges, and all Nature was rejoicing. He felt as if he, too, must pause in his arduous life of work and think. Toney had taught him to work, and once on that road he had not paused. He had become interested in the many threads that had to be woven into the life of Waycott Hall, so much so that sometimes he felt it was necessary to take breath.

What did life mean without some one to work for, some one to love? But he had never met the woman who had called forth his strong affection; indeed, he had never given himself time even to consider the subject; some day he supposed he would meet her, and then——

At this moment Plantagenet Russell heard a scream, and, running up to the field from whence the cry proceeded, he saw to his horror the slight form of Sylvia Hales running towards the gate he was standing by, and behind her, with head down and tail erect, was a bull! Good heavens! Why had some one left a bull in a field through which ran a public path? What could he do? One pause, and then Plantagenet Russell swung himself over the gate, and, snatching a red silk handkerchief from his pocket, he ran on one side and waved it frantically to attract the bull. This might divert the animal, or it might not!

"Run, run for your life!" he cried; and Sylvia,

taking courage, ran with all her might. She saw the gate and the space that separated her from safety was not far, but could she do it? Would her strength hold out? Seeing the new enemy and his red flag the bull paused, and that pause was in Sylvia's favour. The creature struck the ground with its hoof, uncertain which of the two bipeds it should first attack.

"Run, run," repeated Mr. Russell, for he saw the animal now turning towards him. At that moment, and when Sylvia was almost safe, she stumbled over a stake and fell forward; the bull paused again, and Mr. Russell had no time to think. He threw the red handkerchief right in the face of the animal, and in a second he was by Sylvia's side.

"For heaven's sake make an effort; get up, Miss Hales," but fear had paralysed the girl. Mr. Russell stooped down and exerting all his strength he picked her up in his arms, and literally dropped her over the gate. But now the bull, mad to see its prey escape, and having mauled the handkerchief and excited itself still more, dashed towards him. Never in his life had he been so near danger, never had he showed such cool courage. He picked up the great stick over which Sylvia had stumbled, and flung it in the face of the creature, at the same instant flinging himself over the five-barred gate with the agility of an athlete.

Sylvia picked herself up in time to see his escape,

and making a great effort she opened her sunshade which had fallen with her, and waved it in front of the bellowing creature.

"Mr. Russell, oh!—will it——"

"Thank heaven you are safe!" he exclaimed, "but it was the nearest shave. See, there are some men coming to capture it; it must have escaped from another field."

With the shouts behind it, and the sunshade in front of it, the bull was bewildered; it lashed itself round and round till three powerful men with ropes and a net finished its mad career.

There was no time for words. Plantagenet was beginning to speak his mind, but turning towards Sylvia he saw she had turned as white as a sheet.

"Miss Hales—I—you feel faint—all danger is over now."

Sylvia tottered, held out her hand, and then fell into his arms in a dead faint.

This was the last thing Mr. Russell desired, but perhaps feeling this helpless form in his arms, and needing his protection, was the cause of a sudden feeling of compassion which came over him, and which is so closely allied to love! Not that he realized it at all, but as he laid Sylvia gently down under the shade of an elder tree, he no longer felt that duty alone made him do all he could for her. He knelt down and raised her head; he had no handkerchief, but he found hers, and dipped it into

the ditch, then to his relief a little colour came trembling back into her cheeks. Suddenly, to his dismay, he saw a little crowd of men and women running across the road and making its way towards him.

The news had flown, in the mysterious way that news does fly, that Mr. Russell and Miss Hales had been attacked by a mad bull, and that both were lying dead in the field. But worse, for behind the company he saw his two pupils scampering after their father, who was shouting:

"Hullo, Russell! What is the matter?"

"Miss Hales," murmured the unfortunate Mr. Russell, "can you get up? People are coming. They will find us—they—good heavens! she doesn't seem to hear me—Miss Hales!"

Sylvia's form was shaken by a little shiver, and she slowly opened her eyes.

"Are you safe?"

"Yes, we are both safe. Can you get up?"

"Oh, I shall never forget——"

"Oh, yes, you will——" *He* knew he would not, for panting audibly, and with faces filled with big resolves, came the twins, having outrun their father.

"Oh, Planty! Oh, Planty!"

"Yes, yes, it's all right. The bull didn't gore her, she only feels a little faint; no one need have come!" hurriedly ejaculated Mr. Russell.

"Oh, Planty! We are so glad!"

"Glad," repeated Planty in a deep tone of despondency.

"You saved her! It's too—too beautiful! Our first real adventure, so glad—you got it——"

But now many others came up to them.

"Miss Hales feels a little faint, that's all."

"I heard you were both gored to death," said the Squire, smiling.

"No, she was a bit frightened and—fainted."

"How did that bull come into the field?"

"How indeed! It escaped, I suppose."

The twins were now kneeling by Sylvia.

"Oh, Miss Sylvia! you are saved, *he* saved you. We are so glad!" said Francis.

"It all comes of our society," added Louis. "He wouldn't have come just in time if he hadn't been a troubadour! May we help her to get up, Planty?"

But the butler and the housekeeper gently put the boys away, and sentences such as "Such a mercy," "Poor thing," "What an escape," followed, whilst the Squire walked back to the gate with Mr. Russell.

"I must inquire into this. What did you really do?"

The twins had run to his side.

"Do tell us *exactly*, Planty."

"Did she throw her glove? Oh, no, you had it!"

Mr. Russell took no notice of them, and addressed the Squire.

"Miss Hales must have been walking back from the Copse cottages, and that brute escaped from the upland meadows. I heard her scream, and tried to distract the animal, but—really I hardly remember what I did."

"I know," exclaimed Louis, "you put yourself in front of the bull, and told her to save herself, and leave you, didn't you?"

"Did you say, 'I'll die for you,' Planty? They usually do."

The Squire could not help laughing, and Mr. Russell had to follow suit as he murmured, "What nonsense."

Then they returned, to find Sylvia standing up supported by the housekeeper and the butler: but at that minute the Vicar came running up, looking very scared.

"Oh, Sylvia!"

"She's all right, sir; just a bit dazed with fright," said the housekeeper soothingly.

"Oh, Mr. Hales! she was nearly killed," exclaimed Louis, "but Mr. Russell saved her!"

"At the risk of his own life," added Francis.

"Nonsense," repeated Mr. Russell; "come, boys, we must get back, Miss Hales is well looked after."

Much to the regret of the twins they were hurried off, but they found enough breath to sing Planty's

praises all the way home ; and to himself Mr. Russell said :

" Was there ever such an unlucky man ! And the worst is I did save her . . . and she'll think it her duty to thank me."

" You'll tell us all about it this afternoon, Planty, at our meeting of troubadours, won't you ? Oh, it's lovely ! "

CHAPTER XVII.

A MEETING OF THE SOCIETY.

Of course the subject of conversation at lunch time had not to be sought for! Toney was full of it, and only so sorry she had not been on the spot. Her praises and congratulations were nearly as trying to Mr. Russell as those of the twins. The Squire was much disturbed by the whole episode. He could not help remembering that any of them might have been in the same danger as Sylvia Hales, and that even the twins were allowed to go through those fields alone. Miss Honoria, who was down for the first time, agreed with her nephew that such an episode was unpardonable; but Toney remarked that we were always surrounded by dangers, and it was useless bothering ourselves too much, and after all, thanks to Mr. Russell, all had ended well.

Louis and Francis took quite another view of the episode, and retailed their joy to the Faber family as well as to their father.

"Isn't Mr. Russell lucky, Pupsey? It's all

because he joined our troubadours," said the President of the Society.

"You thought of that, didn't you?" asked Francis earnestly; and Mr. Russell couldn't tell a lie.

"Well, I suppose I did if I had time to think." He knew he *had* thought of those dreadful troubadours.

"And you thought of *her* too," murmured Louis.

"Of course Mr. Russell thought of saving Miss Hales, Louis; how could he help it when he did it so pluckily?" said Toney.

"You don't understand, Mumsey, it wasn't Miss Sylvia, it was his la——"

Mr. Russell was desperate.

"Louis, it's a secret, isn't it? You are like a girl, and can't keep anything to yourself."

That remark was effective, so the two brothers contented themselves with looking at each other, and nodding at Mr. Russell; but Toney laughed inwardly as she noticed Mr. Russell's embarrassment, which amused her immensely. After lunch the party dispersed—the Squire to make more inquiries about the accident, and Toney to the Vicarage, whilst the boys went to their preparation.

Nothing but his fear of what might be said, and his hopes of being able to avert worse things, made Mr. Russell appear at the first general meeting of the troubadours and their friends, which took place

on this very afternoon. The schoolroom was a delightful room with plenty of windows ; possessing, moreover, a lovely view over the park, for Toney believed in surrounding children with beauty as well as with light and fresh air. All the male folk tramped up to the meeting, feeling they could do no less to repay the twins for their evening's entertainment, but they saw no signs of levity here. John and James had put the chairs in stern rows, so that the meeting had a very serious air. Louis was on an extemporary platform, and Francis, violin in hand, gazed at the ceiling to show that no smiles were to be sought for or expected from him. So with well-suppressed merriment the Squire, Edward Lang, Frank Weston, Sir Evas, and the Vicar took their places—no ladies being admitted—and Louis immediately took the chair.

"Gentlemen, I'm very glad to see you all here, because I hope you'll all become troubadours. If you do, you are sure to have lovely adventures like our first troubadour, Mr. Plantagenet Russell." Mr. Russell looked fixedly and stolidly before him. "Your lady-loves are sure to give you adventures and accidents if you join, and then you'll have the chance of doing a noble deed! Anyhow, every troubadour must do a noble deed every day—something he wouldn't do if he wasn't a troubadour; Francis and me have been very busy trying to find examples." ("Hear, hear," said the Squire.)

"It's something you don't like doing, and it's best to have a book and put it down, as one may forget. This morning we were very busy thinking about our meeting, but we heard shouting and something about a mad bull and Mr. Russell, so we scrambled down from the loft, though we didn't want to, and we were so glad we did, because——"

Mr. Russell here interrupted the speaker with:

"As mad bulls come seldom, perhaps the President will tell us what other things we must look out for?"

"Are there fines?" said Edward Lang, laughing, "for I fear——"

Francis now came to the help of the President.

"The President has to decide that, but anyhow, every troubadour must write verses about his lady-love, only he must not let out her name."

There were groans from several unpoetical persons.

"You can write about anything," said Francis, "till you find a lady; about spring, and trees, and meadows, and flowers."

"And the nightingale," added Louis; "but it's better to sing about your lady, and I think when the troubadours talk of nightingales they mean their ladies. Bernand de Ventadour sings about his, and he says: 'I appear gay, but anguish destroys my heart.'"

"Then he adds," continued Francis, "'I will sing no more, I will depart thence, no, I will stay;

my constancy will, perhaps, touch the dear object from whom in vain I attempt to fly.' "

These lines were said off rather like a lesson, and had evidently been learnt by heart. At this moment Mr. Russell did not bless these good memories, for amidst ill-suppressed laughter Mr. Lang exclaimed :

" May we call upon the Troubadour Russell to tell us if he has found his membership easy ? "

" I've only just joined," said Mr. Russell; " I'm only—a novice."

" Oh, Mr. Russell, do come up here and tell people about the bull; they'll all join then," said Louis earnestly; and the four blue eyes appealed to him. What could he do, poor man ?

" I don't wish to discourage any person wishing to become a member, but—I advise them first tc count the cost," he murmured.

" May we know if members can procure the troubadour book, and how much it costs ? " asked Mr. Hales, smiling. " It seems to contain a great deal of information."

" No," said Louis, " it's only the President that can have that book, but we'll tell you anything you want to know."

" I see it's question time," said Mr. Lang, " then may I ask for a list of good deeds that would make one's conscience easier at night ? "

" And if the good deed hasn't been done by

night-time," said Sir Evas, "what happens then?"

"And if a lady can't be found," continued Mr. Lang, "does one advertise for her?"

There was just a tone of levity in these questions which pained the twins, but they were equal to the occasion.

"Francis, you answer the first question," said Louis gravely, and Francis stood up.

"All true troubadours can find out a noble deed for themselves. You can go to see a very disagreeable friend" (smothered laughter was heard from the back of the room), "or go without your dinner and give it to a poor man" (several groans), "or you can go and sing songs in the village and beg for your dinner. 'Love alone inspires the muse,' Bernand says; or you can go and try to find a new member, or you can find a lady for another member, or a troubadour for a lady, and you mustn't ever forget to ask for a glove—a gauntlet glove."

"The right hand or the left?" asked Sir Evas.

"It doesn't matter, only it *must* have a gauntlet. Now it's your turn, Louis."

"Mr. Lang asked about a lady. Of course it's difficult, but of course things the troubadours have to do aren't easy; only the President (that's me) and Troubadour Francis will always help you."

"Yes, I know they will," said Mr. Russell sadly.

"Oh, about the good deed at night, which Uncle

Evas asked about," said Francis; "if he hasn't done it he mustn't go to bed, but walk up and down till he's composed a poem and written it down. He can send it to the President the next day."

A universal groan arose. To go without your dinner was bad, to beg for it was worse, but to write a poem instead of going to bed was a burden too heavy for common humanity.

The twins heard the murmur of dissent and they hastened to give comfort.

"It wouldn't happen often, about bed," said Louis, "because people would remember all the day about it, and they would take care not to forget the good deed."

"And, please," added Francis, "now that you all understand about our new society, will you please write your names in this book? I'll come and take it round."

Quite audible groans were now heard.

"Is there anyone who can let us off if—we fail in our duty?" asked Sir Evas.

"Oh, yes, of course the President is very kind, and Mr. Russell understands all about it too. He wouldn't reveal the name of his lady-love for anything, would you, Mr. Russell? He's like Troubadour William, who said, 'Would you know her name? It is written in fairest characters on the wing of every dove.' Of course he didn't mean that really!"

A burst of laughter drowned Mr. Russell's groan, and as Francis went round with the book to collect names, the unfortunate man was glad to see that he had companions in misfortune.

After his name Sir Evas wrote "With reservations." Mr. Lang put "Only a novice." Mr. Weston wrote "Probationer," and Harry boldly wrote "On appro." Then the great bell announcing that tea was ready in the library was heard, and they all dispersed with extraordinary rapidity. The twins and John and James were left to put the room in order, and to discuss their success.

"I saw a lot of them laughing," said John, who had been sitting at the back.

"Mr. Lang said, 'It will be the death of me,' What did he mean?" asked James.

"The troubadours are always gay," said Louis with decision.

"Mr. Lang meant something else," said Francis; "it's like the troubadours talking of nightingales and meaning their ladies; he didn't mean he was going to die, I'm sure."

"Mr. Russell was very serious all the time," said Louis. "He's a real troubadour, and he's had his adventure! I wish he would have told us more, but he's very humble about it all. Pupsey says gentlemen never boast."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NOBLE DEED.

SYLVIA HALES was nearly as much perturbed about her rescue as was Mr. Russell himself. There was no doubt that he had saved her life, and she felt she had not cut a very brave or noble figure in the adventure; but how could people help their nerves? She appealed to her brother.

"Do you think I ought to thank Mr. Russell in person, or would it do if I wrote to him?" she said in a sad tone.

Mr. Hales was so simple in all his words and deeds that he never could understand his sister.

"Why not thank him in person? He was very plucky and very brave. He is wonderfully changed. It's Mrs. Waycott's influence."

"Oh, you men always admire everything Toney does."

"She never admires herself," answered the Vicar gently, which added fuel to fire.

"I can't go up to Waycott Hall and ask to see him," she said impatiently.

"I'll ask him and the boys to come to tea to-day. The visitors are leaving. Those little fellows were as excited over the affair as if——"

"Oh, yes, they have some silly ideas about being troubadours."

The Vicar fairly laughed.

"You should have been at the meeting yesterday! It was the finest thing I have ever heard, especially as we all fought shy of their conditions!"

"Oh, perhaps I shall meet him," said Sylvia desperately, for she never could make up her mind, and she did not fancy the tea-party; but Mr. Hales, feeling he, too, had not returned thanks enough, sent a note at once to Mr. Russell, and, unfortunately, also another note to the twins. Mr. Russell would have refused promptly, but to his horror after reading their own invitation the four eyes were fixed on his face.

"Oh, Planty, isn't it awfully jolly of the Vicar, he has asked us all three to tea to-day! We may go, mayn't we, with you? It would be such a treat," said Louis.

"Mr. Hales knows he's a real member of our society," added Francis, "that's why he has asked *us*."

"Perhaps he wanted advice about something," suggested Louis. "And you will see Miss Sylvia,"

he continued, looking earnestly at his tutor. "You will be so very glad, won't you, Planty?"

Happily at that moment Mr. Weston entered the schoolroom.

"Francis, I want to suggest something. Your mother says I may."

"Is it about music, Godfather?" and the boy's face was immediately illumined.

"Francis' ears are so odd," murmured Louis, looking with admiration at his brother's natural lobes.

"I want to send a good teacher once a week, to give you a lesson. Herr Mayer is a man I can trust, and you will make great progress under him."

"Oh!" exclaimed Francis, "but it costs a lot of money, Godfather, and Mumsey says she can't afford London lessons."

"That will be my affair. My godson must have the best, or none at all."

"Oh, thank you! thank you, Godfather," and Francis threw himself in front of Mr. Weston on one knee. "You're my prince, and princes were always kind to their troubadours and gave them lovely things. When I can, I'll compose beautiful music in your honour."

Frank Weston was half amused and half touched.

"To the honour and glory of God," murmured the great musician. "You must learn early,

Francis, that human praise is—worthless. The talent God gives us must return to Him. Do you understand, my boy ? "

" Oh, yes, Godfather," said Francis, rising. " When Folquet—one of us, you know—began writing one of his songs, he said, ' This Romance was begun in the honour of God, and in the name of God it shall end.' Wasn't that lovely ? "

" Yes, thank you for telling me. It ought to be written at the beginning of our rules, I think Now we are just going ; come and see us off, my troubadours."

It was the custom of Waycott Hall for everybody, if possible, to assemble in the hall to speed the parting guest, and this morning there was a goodly company. Frank Weston smiled as he spoke to his hostess.

" My godson accepts, so you must say nothing against it, Toney."

" It's too much to accept," said Toney, " but it will make the boy very happy. Thank you very much." Toney, who loved giving, knew also how to receive.

Jeanie Weston said good-bye to the boys with a smile they much appreciated.

" We are so grateful for your entertainment, and I've heard all about the troubadours. You know that my husband is really delighted to become one."

"Yes, Aunt Jeanie. I'm sorry ladies can't join, for you are very nice!" said Louis.

"You're a noble lady," added Francis. "Good-bye. I promise I will join your name with Godfather's." Jeanie had not felt prouder for a long time.

"You'll not forget your duties, all our new members, will you?" asked Louis, and there was a chorus of "Of course not."

"Good-bye, Mr. Russell, your boys are too deliciously nice," said Jeanie privately.

"They're not bad at times," said poor Mr. Russell, feeling that the troubadour idea had now no chance of dying a natural death, and he hurried his pupils back to their lessons. Toney lingered with Maud and Mrs. Faber till carriages and cabs arrived.

"I hope the boys don't bother our visitors too much," said Toney sadly. "Mr. Russell does try to suppress them." Cousin Anne smiled.

"You were rather irrepressible yourself in your youth, Toney!"

Toney sighed and then she laughed.

"I guess I was a handful; and Lewis says I'm not a bit changed, worse luck for him!"

The regrets of losing so many of their noble company was much mitigated to the twins by the thought of the tea-party at the Vicarage. The boys said nothing, but thought the more, and retired to the loft to talk it over and to look in their big book

for inspiration. But Mr. Russell, thinking of his tea-party, went to his secretarial work with a heavy heart.

The Vicarage dining-room was a pleasant room with south windows, looking out on to a pretty lawn. In its spring dress it was a little paradise, but since his mother's death the Vicar had not found it altogether a home of comfort. They were not rich, and Sylvia was always sad and discontented. Her sister had married and had gone out to a South African farm, and was as happy as possible, writing glowing accounts of the beauty of the place and of matrimony, and the happiness of herself and her children. To Sylvia everybody appeared happy but herself. To-day she was worrying about the proper way of thanking her deliverer; and those wonderful twins would be there listening with all their ears. It was really perplexing.

When they arrived with Mr. Russell they looked so beaming and so happy that Sylvia's discontent melted before their youthful sunshine. The Vicar was by her side to welcome their guests, and his charming smile made everybody feel at their ease.

"We've come, Mr. Hales," exclaimed Louis; "it was so very, very good of you to ask us."

"It's because you're a troubadour, and that you're one of us," said Francis, with a nod of understanding.

Sylvia held out her hand to Mr. Russell.

"I—I wanted to thank you again," she said simply, and she looked so pretty and so gentle that Mr. Russell's annoyance fled.

"Are you really none the worse?" he asked in an undertone; "please don't thank me, I am *very* glad I was there."

"But so few men would have had your presence of mind. I am afraid I was silly. I ought not to have fainted, but I'm always afraid, my brother says I am, so——"

"It was a terrible moment for you," he murmured. "I don't think you were silly." Her words had called up the manly, protective feeling in him, which a stronger-minded woman would never have done; he even remembered with pleasure the feeling he had when he had lifted her in his arms. She was not like Toney—a woman who never seemed to need protection—but something more delicately fashioned. In the midst of these new feelings the twins rushed in.

"Oh, Miss Sylvia, wasn't it lucky you met your —a—troubadour?" said Francis.

"If we had not made the society Mr. Russell wouldn't have been one," said Louis.

"It was all because——" Francis paused. "I mustn't say." The Vicar laughed.

"Come in to tea; troubadours must eat."

It was worse at the tea-table, their tutor thought,

as there was no way of escape. The Vicar, too, was not to be gagged.

"I wanted to thank you very much for your prompt action, Mr. Russell. Eh, Louis, don't you think the new troubadour behaved in a fitting manner?"

"Yes, Mr. Hales, he was wonderful; it was all because——" Louis received a kick from his brother and a loud aside, "That's a secret, Louis."

"Mr. Hales, have you got a lady-love? You must find one; because, you see, it does help a troubadour so much."

"Does it? Well, I must look about. Perhaps Sylvia will do."

"Oh, no, she's somebody else's."

Mr. Russell dropped a bit of bread and had to pick it up.

"Is she? Well, as she is bespoken I suppose I must look about for some one else."

"There's Mrs. Harris at Stone House, perhaps she'd do," suggested Louis, and Francis added:

"You needn't tell her, you know, only you must promise to yourself to serve her and her only. You did that, didn't you, Mr. Russell?"

"There's to be a new election," said Mr. Russell to Sylvia, "for Stone House; have you anyone you wish to get in?"

"No," said Sylvia sadly, "unless I apply myself. They all seem so very cheerful there."

Mr. Russell looked at her and saw the lines of sadness on her face. He had never looked at her so closely before. The twins were talking with the Vicar, so their remarks were not heard.

"You mustn't be sad," he said gently.

"Oh, there's nothing cheerful here since mother died. Cecil is out all day and it's just the same thing every day."

"You are fond of reading; I could lend you books."

"Oh, thank you!"

"My godfather says, Mr. Hales, that we must put at the beginning of our society Folquet's words: 'This Romance was begun in the honour of God, and in the name of God it shall end.' Mr. Russell thinks the same, don't you, Mr. Russell?" The four eyes were fixed on his face, and this time it was a teaspoon that came rattling down on the floor, and as it rolled far away the four little hands had to seek some time for it before they picked it up.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TEA-PARTY.

Mr. Russell turned the conversation towards hunting, and he thought he had thus saved himself further confusion, but unfortunately Louis had a confession to make which hunting reminded him of.

"Do you think, Mr. Hales, it's very wrong to forsake one lady-love for another?"

"I've never been in that difficulty, Louis," said Mr. Hales smiling.

"And Mr. Russell hasn't either," said Louis. "I know he's faithful to one." Here the four eyes looked at each other and nodded, but Mr. Russell was able to divert Sylvia's attention by fulsome admiration of some greenhouse flowers on the table.

"Cecil has a magic touch with flowers." said Sylvia; "they seem to know him." But Louis' voice rose above Sylvia's soft tones.

"You see, Mr. Hales, I've given up my first lady-love to Francis, and I've promised Gan-Aunt Dove

that she shall be mine because I think she's rather dull and lonely." Mr. Hales' smile deepened.

"She is a little older than you are, Louis."

"That doesn't matter; I think she rather likes being my lady-love. You know she's rather afraid of Miss Crossman, Mr. Hales."

"She isn't respectful to her at all," remarked Francis in a shocked tone; "do you think she was called Crossman because she was cross, or that she was cross because she was called Crossman?"

"That's a very difficult question. What do you think, Russell?"

"I hardly know what to think," said Mr. Russell. He was thinking Sylvia had a very lonely life at the Vicarage and that he must try to brighten it without letting her know it.

"Lady Dove thinks a great deal of you, Louis," continued Mr. Hales. "She was speaking of you the other day. I think it is very nice for you to—to——"

Louis nodded.

"To choose *her*; I thought you'd think so; and she gave me her glove, one with a gauntlet, you know, and I'm as proud as anything. Look, here it is, Mr. Hales." and out of some deep inner pocket Louis drew forth Lady Dove's old gardening glove and held it out for admiration.

Mr. Hales took it and tried to hide his smile, but unfortunately Mr. Russell, fearing any question on

the subject, hastily pulled out his handkerchief for an imaginary cough, and—oh, horror!—Sylvia's glove came out with it and fell on the floor. Francis immediately jumped up and pounced upon it.

"Oh, Mr. Russell, it's yours! Louis, look he's got his too! Mr. Hales, look at Mr. Russell's lady's glove. I wish you had yours too. I've got mine," and out came Francis' glove, for he did not wish to be the one left out.

"Nonsense, Francis!" exclaimed poor Mr. Russell. "I thought you said——"

"Oh, we're all troubadours here, so we needn't mind," answered Louis, coming to the rescue.

"Isn't it nice? I've got Aunt Dove's, and Francis has his lady's glove, and Mr. Russell has——"

Mr. Russell hastily snatched Sylvia's garden glove away and thrust it into his pocket, but not before Sylvia had recognized it and had turned crimson. Mr. Hales was still holding Lady Dove's right-hand garden glove, so happily he did not notice his sister's confusion.

"Take it, Louis, and keep it safe. It will remind you of the duty of——"

"Yes, I know," added Louis, who, being President of the Troubadours, was not quite willing to receive advice.

"My Gan-Aunt said she would do what you asked her, Miss Sylvia," he continued, "though it was because I asked her, she said——"

"No need to repeat anything more," interposed Mr. Russell, who feared repetition from that quarter. "After tea we are going to walk to Aldersfield; shall I take another message for you, Miss Hales?"

The twins winked at each other in high delight! Troubadour Planty was doing what he should—that is, asking for commands, and unfortunately he saw their telegraphic glances. If only they would take to another game how thankful he would be!

"Ah!" said Mr. Hales, "we all seem to be rich in—gar—in ladies' gloves."

"Yes, it's beautiful," said Louis; "we must find you one too, Mr. Hales, but it's difficult." Mr. Russell again made a desperate attempt at changing the conversation and Sylvia came to his aid.

"I hear, Louis, that Captain Grant was delighted with his little dog. He wants to see you," she said.

"I *am* glad; may we go to-morrow, Mr. Russell?"

"I am going," said Sylvia, "and if you like you can call for me."

"We will," said Francis, nodding, "and perhaps Mr. Russell will come too."

"Oh, you can let Mr. Russell off," answered Sylvia. Her cheeks were still very pink.

"Of course we *could*, but I expect he'll *want* to come very much, won't you, Mr. Russell?"

"It depends on my work. There is a good deal

going on at Stone House just now," answered poor Mr. Russell, turning in desperation to the Vicar. "Mrs. Waycott wants to build on another set of rooms, as she has found what she calls 'a desperate case.'"

Everybody laughed; it was so like Toney to find desperate cases.

"You and Mrs. Waycott don't always agree about such cases, do you?" said the Vicar smiling.

"Well no, not always; but she has such specious arguments."

The boys pricked up their four ears, they did not know that word!

"What kind of argument is 'specious,' Mr. Hales? We may talk as we're visitors, mayn't we?" asked Louis. "You see, at home we have to wait till some one asks us a question, but——"

"Oh, of course, visitors are favoured individuals, and you have specious arguments too."

"Yes, of course, I see," said Francis. "Father used to say boys should be seen and not heard, but now we are country gentlemen and troubadours he doesn't say 'boys' any more."

"Of course not," added Louis; "but it's difficult to remember all our societies."

"Oh, dear, I'm glad ladies are not included," laughed Sylvia; "too much would be expected of us."

"We haven't had time to think of the ladies,"

said Louis, "but Francis wants Francis-Jongleurs as well as our troubadours."

"What is that?" exclaimed Sylvia.

"Francisean he means, I think," said Mr. Hales.

Francis nodded. "That's too long, so we call it a Francis-Jongleur. You have to go about singing hymns and begging for your food, and the people like hearing hymns and become good at once, and give you all sorts of things to eat."

"I shouldn't like a mixture," said Miss Hales, actually laughing, and Mr. Russell joined in, but the Vicar seemed to be looking far away beyond the garden and beyond the horizon.

"It's not easy, Francis, to be a saint."

"Oh, no! Mumsey said it wasn't, so I must begin early."

"It isn't easy even to be an eldest son," added Louis, "but Francis doesn't mind. I'll have all the money and the house, and he'll have nothing. Mumsey is a Liberal and says it isn't fair, but Pupsey doesn't agree with her and says it's all right."

"And what are you?" asked Sylvia.

"Oh, we are Conservatives. Francis is glad I'm going to be rich and that he will be poor; he'll have more time to go round singing and begging for his dinner."

"You'll be one too, won't you, Mr Hales?" asked Francis eagerly. "Mother often says you're a

saint and——" Mr. Hales' pale face became a shade pinker.

"Francis, what about repeating?" said Mr. Russell.

"Oh, it's all right! Mumsey says repeat all the good you hear, and none of the bad."

The four eyes looked at their tutor, and how could he contradict this good maxim? He was silent.

At last the tea was over and the Vicar took the twins to his study to show them some foreign curiosities which they loved, and Mr. Russell was left alone with Sylvia. He felt dreadfully shy—a state of mind he had never experienced before. He tried to plunge into an indifferent subject.

"Lady Dove has taken a wonderful fancy to Louis."

"Yes, indeed; I make him my messenger. She can't say 'no' to him. She doesn't care at all about Francis, but they don't seem jealous of each other, which is sweet of them."

"Jealous! No, I never saw anything so perfect as their affection for each other."

He felt he mustn't get on the subject of affection however, so he plunged again, "I mean they——"

"I know. I wish one could copy their virtues. Jealousy is a horrid—experience."

Plantagenet Russell knew the story of Captain Kemp, who had married a rich widow, and he felt

deeper pity than ever. Why was it that he had never pitied her before?

"As one grows older I suppose jealousy wears out," he said meditatively.

"No," said Sylvia, casting her eyes down, "I don't think it does."

Mr. Russell was standing near to her, and before he was aware of it he had taken her hand in his.

"Don't you think, Miss Hales, that sometimes some things we want and do not get are repaid by things far better?"

Sylvia blushed and looked down murmuring, "I don't know—some people get everything they want and others——"

There was a shout and the twins rushed in.

"Oh, Planty!" They paused, and Mr. Russell's hand dropped Sylvia's small fingers as if they were five hot potatoes. "It's all right, Planty; Mr. Hales has to go out and we came just to tell you," said Louis.

"Shall we wait outside?" asked Francis sympathetically; but Mr. Russell declared he was quite ready to go and that he was only waiting for them.

CHAPTER XX.

"MY DEAR HOPE."

"PLANTY, I think you owe a penny," said Francis, after the two had walked in silence a little way, "but I can't be sure if it was a brown, or blue, or black, or white lie about only waiting for us."

"Planty was waiting," said Louis in the capacity of President, "only he liked waiting, didn't you, Planty?"

"No, I never like waiting," said Mr. Russell desperately.

"Not at home, but to-day you did rather, didn't you? Of course, you know best really. Mumsey says we can't see inside the heart, only you ought to like waiting with your L. L., oughtn't you, Planty?"

To deny or to acquiesce was equally bad, but, happily for him, Plantagenet Russell was at that moment recognized by Sir Evas who came towards them.

"How do? I wanted to see you, Russell, so I came to meet you. My wife said she heard from

Toney that you were all three coming to Aldersfield."

"Mrs. Waycott wanted me to see you and get your advice about a new addition to Stone House," said Mr. Russell.

"Oh, dear! I'm sure she can't afford it. She'll ruin Waycott one of these days," said Sir Evas smiling. The twins had each seized a hand; he was always ready for them and they never expected or received any snubbing from him.

"Gan-Uncle Evas, we're so happy! We've had tea at the Vicarage, and Mr. Hales was so nice, and Miss Sylvia and Mr. Russell talked a lot."

"Not so much as you did, I can lay a wager on that."

"We were visitors, and visitors always talk a lot, it's their privilege, Uncle Evas."

"Oh, is it! Well, Mr. Russell's my visitor now, so you can run on alone to Aldersfield."

The twins were only too much delighted, and with the grace and ease of young deerhounds they disappeared up the park drive.

When the two men reached Aldersfield, Sir Evas led the way into his study. Offering Mr. Russell a cigar, Sir Evas drew his chair up to the fire that made the old room look cheerful.

"I wanted to discuss this new plan of more building at Stone House with you, Russell. You see you are quite one of the family now."

Mr. Russell looked up and smiled, and Sir Evas thought what a good-looking fellow he was.

"Yes, Mrs. Waycott always makes me feel one of the family," he said. "I often think, Sir Evas, that she was the only woman who could have kept such a conceited ass as I was when I first came."

Sir Evas laughed heartily.

"It was work, Russell, that knocked that nonsense out of you! I don't mind saying that work saved me too. I was just marking time, but when Toney's fortune came, well then, I did work, you bet, as she says!"

The two men laughed in chorus.

"I was going to ask you in confidence if you think Mrs. Waycott can afford any more building," said Mr. Russell hesitatingly. "You are the only one who can keep her within bounds."

"My dear fellow, honestly I can't, except—on the sly. I've got to be awfully double-faced. Don't know what the twins would say if they knew! To speak plain, I've got a bit of valuable land about which I tell her nothing, and indeed I got her to give it me. It was the only way, 'pon my word it was."

"A bit of land? Is it valuable?"

"Valuable! why, I discovered a very rich coal-mine on it, and Staines and I have had to be awfully sly about it. It's bringing in a lot of money which we keep out of sight." Sir Evas laughed with glee.

"I'm very glad. I was coming to consult you about this new extravagance. Mr. Waycott always says 'yes' to anything his wife suggests."

"Wouldn't trust him either. It's like this, Russell; you see my wife's bent on leaving the property to little Louis; she's quite gone on the boy."

"I'm not surprised," murmured Mr. Russell, thinking, "she hasn't got to play at troubadours."

"That means that Francis would have nothing; hardly fair, so I've got this little plan. I shall leave him those coal mines; perhaps, who knows, he'll be richer than his brother." Mr. Russell smiled.

"Mrs. Waycott is longing for him to try poverty!"

"Oh, yes, of course, all very nice in idea—but——"

"She really means it."

"Yes, yes, always did, you have to save such people from themselves. Anyhow, there's this coal-field, it's already paying very well, and it will pay more. If there's a deficit, you know, Russell, come to me."

They both laughed.

"I must say it is a relief," said Mr. Russell; "you see I look upon Mrs. Waycott's money as my own, and she gives me a very large salary, which sometimes troubles me."

"Not more than you're worth, and then there's

those boys! Upon my word, I wouldn't shepherd them for thousands a year. Then, of course, perhaps you'll be—ahem!—thinking of getting married some day."

Mr. Russell actually turned colour. What could have put that into the mind of Sir Evas?

"I'm not a marrying man at all," he stammered.

"Of course not, but strange things do happen!"

On the opposite side of the house another couple were conversing, for Louis had marched boldly into the drawing-room, where Miss Crossman was reading to Lady Dove. The book was dull, but Lady Dove dared not complain, for complaint meant a quarrel, and she was not feeling well just now. She had certainly very much aged lately. She was therefore quite relieved to see Louis walk in, stopping first at the door to make courtly bows to the ladies.

"Come in, Louis. I'm sure I'm very glad to see you; no one comes near me now, and Miss Crossman has chosen a very dull book."

"I'll tell Mumsey to send you a very amusing one, dear Gan-Aunt. Miss Crossman, I want to talk secrets with my Gan-Aunt; Mr. Russell and Francis are waiting for me." Miss Crossman grunted and closed the book.

"Little boys should not come uninvited."

"Crossman, you forget yourself; my nephew can come when he likes."

"I beg you to give me my title, Lady Dove," said the irate companion.

Louis stood looking from one to the other, then he opened the door and stood in silence ready to bow out the companion, but she elected to go without further wrangling.

"I'm sorry, Gan-Aunt, but Miss Crossman isn't at all nice. We can't make out whether it's because she's called Crossman."

"She's unbearable, Louis, quite unbearable."

The little boy knelt down and kissed the old withered hand.

"Never mind, Gan-Aunt, you've got me, you know, I'll defend you!"

Lady Dove looked down on the child's upturned face and her anger seemed to fade away.

"What's the secret, Louis?"

"Miss Sylvia's very much obliged to you for sending what she asked for old Mrs. Higgins, Gan-Aunt; and, do you know, Captain Grant is so happy with his little dog. He's awfully grateful to you. You're quite Lady Bountiful, aren't you, Gan-Aunt? And I've got your glove, and anyone who isn't nice to you must fight with me."

A smile played on the thin lips. In her old age she was reaping what she had sowed, and she did not like the result. In this arid desert a child's

love had come to make the withered Rose of Jericho to blossom.

"Sit down, Louis, and rest, and then we can have a talk." Louis sat down trying to copy the elder men he saw at home.

"I wanted to consult you, Gan-Aunt. Me and Francis is very glad because Mr. Russell has found a lady-love."

"How extraordinary! I should never have thought he would."

"We mustn't tell you her name, you know, because it's a secret, but we do hope it will come all right and that he won't give her up for some one else."

Lady Dove laughed.

"Why should he, Louis?"

"They did a good deal in our book, but I don't think the nice ones did. They were very constant. Troubadour William calls his lady—she was some one's wife, I forget the name—'My dear Hope.' Don't you think that's a nice name, Gan-Aunt? Shall I call you 'My dear Hope'? It won't matter that you are Uncle Evas' wife." Lady Dove had never been anyone's "Dear Hope." The idea made her smile.

"What do *you* hope for to-day, Louis?"

"I've nothing to-day to hope for, Gan-Aunt: I've just come to talk to you."

"Where's Francis?"

"He's learning to be poor. He said he'd begin here because I said you wouldn't mind, Gan-Aunt."

"Learning to be poor! What an idea."

"He's gone to beg at the kitchen door. You see, me being the eldest and getting all the money, he's got to learn to be poor."

"He need not begin yet, I think," said Lady Dove laughing.

"He's very much in earnest, Gan-Aunt. He wants to be like Mumsey's friend St. Francis. Are you a saint, Gan-Aunt? I guess you are, because you've learnt it."

"Oh, Lord, no, child!" Lady Dove could not accept that title. "But tell me, you don't want to be poor, do you?"

"Oh, no, Gan-Aunt, that's for Francis."

"You shall have Aldersfield when we are gone" (Lady Dove would not have used the word "dead" on any consideration). "Most likely your parents will have to sell Waycott if they go on as they are going. You're the only one that has any sense."

Louis had a way of not noticing Lady Dove's severe speeches: it was only "Gan-Aunt's way of talking."

"You think that, Gan-Aunt, because I'm your troubadour. Their lady-loves were always very nice to them. Our book says: 'Love inspires the greatest actions; love engages to the most amiable conduct; love fills with joy.' We learnt that this

morning after we said our prayers. And, do you know, Gan-Aunt, we keep our book hidden under fishing-nets and tops and things like that—our toys when we were little boys—so as to hide it from Mr. Russell. He wants to find it ever so much, because, you see, he wants advice about *his* lady-love; but I'm President, so I can tell him, if he asks me anything."

Lady Dove was not listening to this prattle; her soothed brain was repeating "Love fills with joy." It was true, the only joy she had felt for years was the love of this child. Though it could not be said that it had yet "engaged her to the most amiable conduct." Louis was not afraid of her; he loved her; she felt she could not bear life without him. Why had he not come earlier into her existence? Why had she never had a son of her own? She put her old, trembling hand into her pocket and drew out her purse.

"Here's a sovereign for you, Louis; I dare say your mother keeps you short." Louis took the gold piece very simply.

"Thank you, Gan-Aunt, very much. I must bore a hole in it—our Jim will do it for me—and keep it as a love token; only a very great lady can give gold."

"Nonsense, boy, you must spend it."

"I must think about it. Do you know, Gan Aunt, that Francis is going to have real London

lessons, and when he's playing his violin I'll come and see you. Our Jim can come with me; Mumsey won't always let me come alone, and it's right for a troubadour to have a servant, and then you and I can talk about things."

At this moment the door was opened rather precipitately and the butler exclaimed:

"Oh, my lady, Master Francis is behaving very strangely at the back door. I thought I had better tell your ladyship—a bit off his head, we fear!"

CHAPTER XXI.

LEARNING TO BEG.

PLANTAGENET RUSSELL, after discussing the coal-mine with Sir Evas, both feeling much like two conspirators, rose to go, as he said :

"The boys must get back; Mrs. Waycott gives them an hour before bed-time."

"All as mad as March hares," said Sir Evas chuckling; "the ideas she stuffs into those poor boys' heads!—but it's wonderful how my wife has taken to Louis! She's always talking about him and pitying him." They both laughed.

"I'm afraid it's wasted pity," said Mr. Russell. "I never met two happier boys."

"Just what Hales was saying to me. By the way, it's a secret, but Hales is going to resign the living!"

"Mr. Hales is going to resign!" exclaimed Mr. Russell. "Impossible!" A series of consequences flashed into his mind!

"It's true. He's another to match the two!

Thinks he's too happy here, and must go and be a missionary in some of the wilds of somewhere! I don't dare tell Toney, she thinks no end of him."

"He's so very good to the Stone Housers," said Mr. Russell. "If there is any little misunderstanding I go to him and he sets it right at once. Stone House, instead of being a hotbed of bickerings, as many of these places are, is really a haven of peace."

"That's just what I told him; he's giving up a visible duty for an invisible martyrdom, or some such rubbish! And then there's his sister!"

"She will go with him?"

"She doesn't know yet, but I can't fancy her roughing it in the wilds, perhaps with no one to speak to but a black or a brown man—she's not cut out for that."

"Certainly not: Mr. Hales is much to blame!"

"Just what I tell him, but he never could understand Sylvia. He's all for subduing the flesh and she—well—she's a pretty woman."

"Preposterous!" said Mr. Russell with energy, but at that moment the housekeeper opened the door, looking much alarmed.

"I said you were here, Mr. Russell; if you'll forgive me, Sir Evas, there's Master Francis acting very strange-like at the kitchen door. We think he's gone a bit queer."

The two men hastily marched towards the

kitchen, but before they reached it Francis appeared in strange attire.

"Oh, Uncle Evas, it's no good, they won't believe me! I was learning to be poor!"

"Good heavens, Russell, what's this mad idea!"

Mr. Russell laughed, for the appearance of his pupil was certainly grotesque. He was hatless, barefooted, and he had taken off his coat, and with the help of mud he looked as much of a beggar as it was possible for him to look, and, besides this, he held something tied up in a pocket-handkerchief.

"Oh, Planty, I was so anxious for them to give me scraps, but Mrs. Jones won't! Mumsey said I had to learn to be poor, and how can I?"

Sir Evas' laughter was very disconcerting to the new beggar.

"Where are your shoes and stockings, Francis?" said Mr. Russell. "We can't go home—ahem!—like this."

"They're all safe, Planty, in a bush in the shrubbery; I ought to have given them away, but I couldn't find anyone but Sam, and his feet are too big. Mayn't I just walk home without them?"

Mr. Russell shuddered inwardly as he exclaimed: "Certainly not!" and at this moment Miss Crossman came through the hall.

"Whatever are you doing in that state, Francis?" she asked sternly.

"It's all right, Miss Crossman! I just went

round to the kitchen door to beg for scraps, and Pasha Jones was with me, and I was only trying to be like St. Francis. Mrs. Jones gave me some veal pie, but you see I wasn't hungry, so I've got it in my handkerchief to save it for somebody poorer."

"Well, I call it disgraceful!" said Miss Crossman; "I wonder you let the boy make such a guy of himself, Mr. Russell! I'm sure Lady Dove wouldn't be pleased if she saw him."

Happily Louis appeared at this moment, and, taking in the situation, was highly delighted at the appearance of his brother.

"Oh, Francis, you did do it well! Planty, isn't he lovely? He's got mud on his nose! Oh! I wish I might be a beggar, too."

"Go and help Francis at once to—put on his things again," said Mr. Russell in despair, but Sir Evas could only laugh as the brothers disappeared.

"'Pon my word, those boys ought to be in a lunatic asylum; I'll walk down to the gates with you, Russell, and they can follow."

And soon after four swift feet were heard running behind them, followed by Pasha Jones, who appeared very anxious to make a closer acquaintance with what was in Francis' tied-up pocket-handkerchief.

"It's all right, Planty, Sam helped us to put Francis' things on again. Oh! it was too awfully

nice, wasn't it ? " exclaimed Louis in unbounded admiration of his brother.

" You know, Gan-Uncle, it's very, very, very difficult to make your servants believe I am poor. I hadn't got my violin so I couldn't play to them. I expect that made the difference. Mrs. Jones wouldn't give me one real scrap ; you know, uncle, St. Francis put dust into his food for fear he should think it too good."

" I wouldn't try that on just yet, Francis. I think your saint didn't know anything about microbes or germs."

" Nothing didn't hurt him, did it, Mr. Russell ? because he was a saint ; it wouldn't hurt you either, Uncle Evas, because you're a saint too ; so it would be easy for you to go begging, wouldn't it ? "

" I hope I may be excused—at present, anyhow, Francis," said Sir Evas. " Well, good-bye, Russell, don't forget my message to Toney. I'll be round to-morrow, but my wife was very poorly to-day and didn't want me to go far."

" I am going to look after Gan-Aunt Dove in future," said Louis, " she says I do it better than anyone else, but of course it's my duty, isn't it, Mr. Russell ? I expect Miss Syl—I mean your lady-love would say the same."

Sir Evas heard no answer, for the tutor walked away as if he were shod with seven-league boots.

When they reached home the boys retired to

make themselves presentable to their mother, and Mr. Russell entered Toney's study, where the boys spent many happy, free hours with her, imbibing so many of their inconvenient ideas.

"The boys are rather late, I'm afraid, Mrs. Waycott, but Sir Evas kept me." Toney was arranging some spring flowers in a bowl.

"It does not matter at all; but what does Uncle Evas say about the extra rooms?"

Toney spoke quite humbly; she knew that Mr. Russell and her uncle were of one mind as to her expenditure.

"He said, as I did, that you could not afford it."

"Oh, dear! I really think you must be mistaken, but of course our kind of simple life does seem to take an awful lot of money. What could I do without you, Mr. Russell? You see, Lewis always declares I must have this and the other if I want it, so that I don't like asking him." Mr. Russell smiled.

"I'm sure you never spend enough on yourself, but Sir Evas says——"

"I know that my Stone Housers have enough! Honestly, Mr. Russell, you know there's not one of them that has any prospect but the workhouse if Stone House did not exist." Toney stood up, looking so pretty and with such a bewitching smile on her lips that Mr. Russell could not harden his heart any more, as he had meant to do.

"Sir Evas says that *he* will build what you want."

"Oh! Uncle Evas says that! Well, he is a brick; but Aunt Dove won't let him, I know!"

Mr. Russell smiled as he murmured:

"It won't come out of the Aldersfield estate, but out of some—land he says you gave him."

"Well, that is real nice of him! Did you ever know a greater saint, Mr. Russell?"

Mr. Russell smiled.

"But he makes one condition. It's to be called the Dove Cot!"

They both laughed, and Toney added:

"Of course it shall! Fancy his thinking of that without any help! It's wonderful how sharp Uncle Evas has become; I'm nowhere. There, I hear the boys, so you must go. They'll have grand stories to tell me."

"They will, Mrs. Waycott; and really Francis' last idea is—a little inconvenient! He nearly stripped himself and went begging at the kitchen back door at Aldersfield. They all thought he had a tile off!"

Toney's burst of merriment was irresistible, and Mr. Russell had to join in, but he retreated quickly as the twins came rushing into the room.

"Oh, Mumsey, we've had a glorious time!" exclaimed Louis.

"Mumsey, you said St. Francis did his begging

quite easily, but I find it's very, very difficult to beg."

"Oh, Francis did look lovely, Mumsey! I wish I could be the second son for a little while!"

"And look, Mumsey, here's my veal pie. I've got it quite safe. It's getting a little mixed with other things I put in, because it got jolted coming home, but that's all the better, isn't it?"

"And, Mumsey, Francis says it's real nice going barefoot; may I do it too?"

"No, Louis mustn't" said Francis, jealous for his poverty, "because he's the eldest and has to be rich. It's a great responsibility you said, Mumsey."

"Yes, and Gan-Aunt Dove says I'm to have Aldersfield too, Mumsey. I shall be a double heir; is that double responsibility?"

"Oh, Mumsey, there's nobody very poor in the village. I offered my pie to two boys and they shook their heads. There's only Pasha Jones who *really* wants it!"

By this time they were out of breath, and Toney got her innings; and the two boys, clinging round her, heard a great deal of unusual advice and received much sympathy for both their inspirations.

"Mumsey, it's wonderful what's in your head," said Louis, "but if all you say is true, it's awful hard to be an eldest son."

"It is, my sonny."

"And it's not so easy as I thought, Mumsey, to

be one of God's troubadours, like St. Francis. Perhaps there'll be a plague or a famine in the village, and then it will be much easier."

"Gan-Aunt says all our people are too well off," said Louis, "but that's only Gan-Aunt's way of saying things. I think she's awfully good really, and quite a Lady Bountiful, don't you?"

Somehow or other Toney avoided answering that question.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT LOUIS SAW.

It was quite as much a puzzle as the reason of Miss Crossman's temper. Did Mr. Russell's love-making begin with the troubadours, or were the troubadours answerable for the love-making?—but in this case the boys were in no doubt. If Planty had not been a troubadour he would never have found a lady-love! To-day, a lovely hot spring day, the twins met after lunch in the loft to discuss a very curious and interesting episode which Louis had witnessed. It was the first day of Herr Mayer's lesson. He came down from London in good spirits because the great Frank Weston had told him he would find a boy genius at Waycott Hall. Now a genius has to be treated with great care, and this German master was the only man in London who knew how to handle a musical genius in the right way.

In this lesson Louis had no part, so he had begged leave to ride to Aldersfield to see Gan-Aunt Dove,

because he had promised her a visit. Theoretically Toney was delighted that Louis should bring a little balm into the withered heart, and at first readily consented.

"Of course I must go alone, Mumsey."

"Of course, if you can go through the gap in the park, dear troubadour."

"No, Mumsey, if you don't mind, I'll go through the village and in at the front gates. It's more respectful for a troubadour to come by the high road than through a gap, and it's only a little way, you know."

Toney had a secret fear of motors on the high roads, but she rebuked her fears.

"Well, certainly it's only a little way, and everybody knows you in the village, though usually I don't like you being *quite* alone on the roads."

Louis laughed.

"Oh, Mumsey, you said we're always safe if we go on good errands."

Doubtless she had uttered this maxim, and she was silent. Then she remarked:

"Mr. Russell is particularly busy this morning. An architect is coming to see about a new Dove Cot. All right, Louis, but remember, a country gentleman takes all reasonable care."

Toney met her husband a minute afterwards and confessed:

"Isn't it dreadful, Lewis, to have one's maxims

repeated ? Of course, Jim could go, but it's such a little way and Louis is so safe on ponyback."

"Oh, he's all right, dearest. I foresee this music will some day part the boys. It's better Louis should be broken in gently."

"I'm sometimes tempted to wish that Francis wasn't a musical genius."

"You, Toney ! What about a buried talent, and you said——"

"No, no, don't quote another of my sayings ! It's *too* dreadful, besides I've given leave ; our boys shan't be milksops ; and, oh, Lewis, I can't tell you how glad I am that Aunt Dove has found some thing to love at last ! You know what somebody wrote, 'A child's kiss set on thy sighing lips shall make thee glad.' "

"It's more than she deserves," muttered the Squire. "Poor Uncle Evas confided to me that Miss Crossman and Lady Dove " (the Squire refused to adopt her ladyship as aunt into his family) "have a battle royal every day. He's dying to send that companion off, but, strangely enough, Lady Dove clings to her tyrant. Odd ! "

"Pups often said our punishments were well chosen. I think Aunt Dove's punishment is awfully well chosen. When I remember Crumpet's fifteen years of slavery, I can't feel very tender."

"And I don't like her ridiculous idea of making

Louis heir to Aldersfield," said the Squire. "I'm sure one property's enough for any man."

"You always were ridiculous about money, Lewis," said his wife, linking her arm into her husband's. "Your punishment will be some fearful access of riches." Then they both laughed, Toney little guessing she was speaking a true word in jest, and how the mines were already beginning the rich punishment.

This conversation is set down, by the way, to show how the future Squire of Waycott Hall was out alone on his pony after his lessons, to go and call on his ancient lady-love, and that what he saw on the way he was now retailing to his brother.

"You see, Francis, I didn't hurry because it was just lovely sunshine, and Pasha Jones was so happy, and we had to stop often to talk to the village friends and salute."

"Yes," said Francis, "I heard the spring, and Herr Mayer didn't laugh one bit when I told him all I heard, and only said: 'Just play it, mein Herr,' and I did."

"It's just your wonderful ears, Francis—well, I didn't hear nothing, but I sniffed it up, and I saw a lot of our people in the village and just talked to them, and then I went on a little and I heard some one walking very quick behind me."

"Oh," said Francis, "some one we know?"

"No, it was a shortish officer man, and he hadn't

at all a jolly face, Francis, and he said, 'Little boy, can you tell me if Mr. and Miss Hales still live here?'"

"Did he say 'little boy'?"

"Yes, and I just looked at him, and didn't say nothing at first, and he said again, 'Little boy,' then I said, ''Scuse me,' and then he said louder still as if I was deaf, 'Is Miss Hales living here still?' and he just twisted his moustache like this, Francis, then I knew it *was* an officer, but I wasn't going to tell him, only just then Miss Sylvia comes running down to the Vicarage gate and calls out to me, and then she looked at the officer and he went up to her."

"Oh, Louis, what did you do?"

"Why, I thought I'd better stay and protect her, but they didn't take any notice of me, and she turned quite white and held the gate tight."

"And what did he say?"

"He said, 'Sylvia, I've come back,' and she didn't say nothing, but held the gate tight, and I called out, 'I'm here, Miss Sylvia,' and the kind of officer turned and looked at me quite black and said, 'Who's that little boy?'"

"Oh, how rude!" said Francis. "What did you say?"

"I said, ''Scuse me,' again, and then I said, 'I'm a troubadour, and if Miss Sylvia wants help I'm here,' and then he burst out laughing, and he

said, 'May I come in, Sylvia?' and she nodded at me like, says 'Good-bye,' and went up the drive with him, and then I went on to Gan-Aunt Dove."

"Oh, I know," exclaimed Francis, "it's the false lover; I heard Mumsey talking about him once, and he married a rich widow, and that's why Miss Sylvia looks so sad."

"I knew it was," said the President of the Troubadours with dignity, "and I was just longing to get back and consult you, Francis, but I had to see Gan-Aunt Dove first, because I'd promised."

"Was Miss Crossman cross?"

"Oh, dreffull! and I said, 'My dear Hope'—that's my new name for Gan-Aunt Dove—'don't mind her, she's your cross.'"

"What did she say?"

"She smiled and said, 'Thank you, Louis,' and then we just chatted together."

"Louis, we must tell Planty."

"We must!"

"He mustn't get his lady-love taken away without fighting for her."

"Course not. We must tell him gently. He'll be drefful upset."

"He will. How shall we begin?"

"He's seen her very often lately, and has taken books and flowers I've seen him when he thought we weren't looking."

"And he always goes on the road when he thinks she's coming out."

"Of course, that's his duty, isn't it, Louis?"

"Of course. Shall we come now?"

"Mumsey says 'the sooner the better' if you've got a disagreeable duty to do."

"Of course it's our duty."

They stood up resolutely, and going to the trap-door let themselves down into the sink and from thence to the ground.

"You're the President, Louis, you go first."

"If you begin to break it gently, I'll finish," said Louis.

This very afternoon Mr. Russell could not as usual settle down to his work in his study. It was quite true that he had seen Sylvia often, and had taken her books and flowers. When she looked pleased and less sad he felt cheerful; but this morning she had told him of her brother's resolution, and the tears had slowly trickled down her face.

"I know it will be better for him, but it does seem so hard to break up our only home."

Mr. Russell had murmured something about "a silver lining," and might have gone on to more personal remarks, only the doctor had interrupted him with a request to Miss Hales to come and see a poor woman who had had an accident. Sylvia was always at her best in such cases, and she had run off without waiting a moment.

Mr. Russell walked up and down, feeling miserable. Sylvia must not be left to a lonely life. When her brother became a missionary she would have to turn into a governess, or something dreadful like that! A gentle, lonely girl like her ought not, must not, be left to battle the world alone! It had come to this: Should he ask her to be his wife? But she would never accept him, her heart had been given long ago, and she was so constant, so true! —and more in the same strain. It was during this meditation that he heard a gentle tap.

"Come in," he said, almost glad to be interrupted, and there stood the twins. To see them in their play-time was so unusual that he said at once.

"Something's the matter?"

"Yes, Planty. We thought we ought to come and tell you."

"Well, what is it?" He quickly noted that all the legs and arms were in their usual places, and a very healthy colour on their cheeks.

"Me being President, Planty, it's my duty——" Mr. Russell inwardly shuddered.

"Louis says I'm to begin."

"Yes, well, begin," said Mr. Russell in trepidation.

"It's about your lady-love, Sylvia." Mr. Russell had guessed as much.

"Troubadour Planty, your lady has another lover!" said Louis.

" A horrid man with a moustache," added Francis.

" I think he's the false lover," added Louis.

" She turned quite white," said Francis.

" I told her I would defend her," continued the President, " but of course, Planty, it's *your* duty. If you don't go he'll carry her off."

" Marguerita said, ' William, if a lady loved thee, couldst thou love again ? ' And William said, ' Yes, truly, madam.' "

" What does all this mean ? " said Mr. Russell quickly. " What are you talking about ? "

" You know, Planty. It's a black one if you say you don't," said the President with dignity.

" If I was you, Planty, I'd go at once to the Vicarage. We would, wouldn't we, Louis, if we were Planty ? "

"We would," said the President gravely. "It's all true; I saw it with my eyes this morning, but we couldn't tell you at dinner, could we ? "

" Thank heaven ! " muttered Mr. Russell. " Oh, yes, very well, thank you, all right, I'll go," and seizing a hat and then a book for an excuse, Mr. Russell strode out of the window. The boys looked at each other.

" Isn't it beautiful, Francis, the way he acted ? It was your talking of William which decided him."

" I expect it was, and Marguerita, too."

" Which do you think will win her ? "

"I expect they'll have to fight for her! Oh, I wish we could be there, don't you, Francis?"

"Yes," said Francis. "Planty is lucky getting so many adventures. It's more than his share, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Louis. "Mumsey always says there's some people born lucky. Don't you think, Francis, we'd better follow him in case there was a fight."

"Yes," answered Francis, "they might want us if they were wounded," and following Mr. Russell's example the twins strode out of the open window and ran swiftly towards the village.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. RUSSELL'S WOOING.

And thus it happened that Sylvia Hales, who had thought that her life was very uninteresting and that all her happiness had departed, found herself in a strange position, and, as often happens in life, that which we most desire, when it comes, arrives in a most disappointing form. How many hours had she wasted crying about Captain Kemp's treachery in forsaking her and marrying the rich widow! How often had she wished he would come back and woo and win her; but here he was, and yet Sylvia felt her heart beat no quicker, and something about him made her wish that he had not come.

The pretty drawing-room where they were now sitting by the open window was deserted, and the Captain began at once pleading his cause.

"You know, Sylvia, I could not choose the woman I loved. I had no private means, you had none, I

had to accept what was—offered to me, but now she is dead."

Sylvia felt quite sorry for the widow now, though she had before hated her.

"I didn't know that she—was dead," she gasped.

"It was quite sudden. The doctor said she must always have had heart complaint; we were travelling in Italy for her health—and—when it was all over, you know, Sylvia, where my thoughts flew."

The Captain twirled his moustache and came quite close to her. Sylvia wished his thoughts had not flown so quickly. She had a very refined nature, and all her life she had lived with high-minded people, their only fault being their too great saintliness. Captain Kemp's word jarred on her, though here was her once-beloved Arthur pleading with her to say "yes," and further, Arthur was now rich.

"Look here, Sylvia, I didn't behave quite square, but I know you have cared for me all the time. You can't deny that, can you?"

Sylvia wanted to, but could not, so was silent.

"And I have cared for *you* all the time."

"Oh, don't," said Sylvia, "don't say that; I would rather you didn't."

The Captain thought this foolish maidenly modesty, and didn't believe it. In the old days

Sylvia had been abjectly devoted to him. He had never doubted his being able to have her when he chose, and here she was making such a fuss about that word of three letters!

"Oh, come, Sylvia, it's more honest to be truthful; of course you'll say 'yes.'"

Sylvia looked so gentle, so pretty, so dependent that the Captain felt he had never loved her as much as he did at this moment. What a devoted wife she would make; she would never contradict him—the widow had been masterful—and as he was rich, life would spin along most agreeably. But it was time Sylvia did more than look down, clasping and unclasping her hands. He had arrived about twelve o'clock, and they had lunched *tête à tête*, the Vicar being away on an errand of mercy, and yet Captain Kemp seemed no nearer to hearing Sylvia say "yes."

The afternoon sun looked tempting, and Sylvia made a charming picture as she sat there, the flickering sunlight falling on her fair hair. The Captain thought, "Women are ridiculous; I know she's been waiting for me for years, and now she's so coy! Ridiculous!"

"Well," he said, "when is my little lady-love going to say 'yes'?"

This was an unfortunate expression for him to use, for it photographed on her mind a tall, strong man, who had never made love in words, but who

had saved her life at the risk of his own; it even photographed the picture of four blue eyes that were so eager about her being "Planty's lady-love."

"My brother is going to be a missionary, Arthur, perhaps I ought to go with him."

Sylvia never could tell the real motive of any of her remarks; she was very clever at giving wrong reasons.

"Good heavens! A missionary! Are you so anxious to be eaten up by lions or killed by Chinese?" Missionaries were quite strange animals in the opinion of the gay Captain. "What nonsense; now, Sylvia, say 'yes.'"

Poor Sylvia, there was such a tone of possession in the Captain's words that she looked up. She felt the old influence would conquer, yet she did not want it to do so.

Suddenly there was a tap at the door, and Sylvia jumped up. It was only the young maid, who thought it proper to warn Sylvia that she was there.

"Please, Miss Sylvia, a gentleman to see you. He's in the dining-room."

"Hang him!" muttered the Captain. "Sylvia, you shan't go—say you're engaged; you are, you know."

"Jane, tell the gentleman that I'm engaged this afternoon."

"Yes, miss," and Jane retired, having looked at the Captain. Sylvia heard the front door bang

Who could it have been? Mr. Russell wouldn't have said "a gentleman." She sank down again into the arm-chair, and the Captain came much closer to her.

At this moment, however, there was a scamper of feet and a cry of "Tally Ho!" And then after the rush came a pause, and the twins stood at the open window. Louis took no notice of the Captain.

"Oh, Miss Sylvia, you said we might come in this way, and we want particularly to see you and so does Planty. He's round the corner; he says you're engaged particularly, but we said we'd come and see. And, oh! may he come in, or will you go to him? He's something very particular to say."

"A sort of message," said Francis.

"And he's got your glove, you know; you're bound to come to him, aren't you?"

The Captain listened and frowned and twirled his moustache, but could not understand a word of all this, except that somebody wanted to see Sylvia! So he said impatiently:

"I'll wait a few minutes, Sylvia; make haste and come back quickly."

Sylvia started up; a spell seemed to be broken, and the colour rushed back to her cheeks.

"Oh, Louis, Francis, you naughty troubadours! Where is—Mr. Russell?"

She did not know what she was saying, she only knew that she was following the twins, and that she

felt as if some powerful arm had been stretched out to save her from sinking. The twins in an ecstasy of delight danced round her, and led her to the front of the house, where Mr. Russell, looking stern—with fright it was—stood in the shadow of the porch with the buds of the monthly roses touching his head.

"Here she is, Planty, we've found her," cried Louis.

"She wasn't particularly engaged, Planty, only sitting down doing nothing," added Francis.

"And the Captain was twirling his moustache, and looking black, but I didn't speak to him," said Louis loftily.

"And if you'll go into the shrubbery we'll keep watch over him," said Francis.

"Don't you hurry, Planty, because we can manage to keep him quiet."

The boys scampered back to the drawing-room window, and Mr. Russell held a book which he had snatched up as an excuse without looking at it.

"I've brought you a book, Miss Hales," he said, holding out his hand.

"Thank you. Oh," she said, grasping his arm, "help me, tell me what I ought to do," and she hurried him towards the shrubbery. "I'm so miserable; he's come, and he's rich, and free now, and he wants me." He felt her trembling on his arm, and his own strength increased.

"Tell me if you want to go with him."

"I don't know, I don't think so, but he looks at me, and I know I shall say 'yes.' I should have said it this moment but for—the twins coming."

"If you want to say 'yes' is there anything that hinders it?" Sylvia hung her head and clung to him, still trembling.

"He married her, and he says he never loved her. Oh, it might some day be the same with me."

"But he loved you in the old days, and—and—you loved him?"

"Oh, yes, I've told you about it, haven't I? And now—now, when I was forgetting him and when I didn't mind—he—he comes back." Mr. Russell heard a little sob. Some men are not proof against *little* sobs, they can harden their hearts to a loud sobbing, but a little gentle sob bowls them over!

"Look here, Miss Sylvia, don't cry, don't be afraid, ask yourself what you prefer; and look here if—there could possibly be any chance that you could say 'no' to him now he's rich and free, and wants you; is there any—any chance that you could say 'yes' to me, though I'm not rich, but I've never loved anyone before, and—I love you!"

They had reached a summer-house, and Sylvia sank down on the seat and hid her face in her hands, having just set down the book he had given her, and there came another little sob.

"Miss Hales—Sylvia, listen. I don't believe you love him; you wouldn't cry if you did. Look up, say 'yes' to me."

Then suddenly Sylvia recognized the true and the false coin. The sob ceased and she looked up, and her sad blue eyes no longer looked discontented.

"Oh, Mr. Russell!"

"Say Planty, like the twins."

"Oh, you couldn't really love me, I'm so weak, so stupid, so easily led—and if it hadn't been for you—and them——"

"For them first," corrected Planty, "they insisted on my coming."

Then they both laughed, how could they help it, and Sylvia stood up and rested her weary head on his big shoulder, and all her sorrow fled away.

"Oh, Planty, I must say 'yes,' the troubadours expect it!"

"And so do I, darling," and then they both sat down again and forgot for a short blissful time all about Captain Kemp waiting in the drawing-room. It was Sylvia who realized it first; she suddenly jumped up.

"I must go and tell him, and here's your book! Oh, Planty, it was only Bradshaw!" Never before had a wooing been done with a Bradshaw!

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CONQUERED KNIGHT.

When Captain Kemp was left alone he felt extremely cross at having been interrupted by those extraordinary boys. Sylvia would have said "yes" but for them. His temper was not sweetened when he saw them reappearing in a breathless condition, and without Sylvia.

"Where is Miss Hales, little boy?" he asked sternly of Louis, who had arrived first.

"'Scuse me," said Louis, doffing his hat with dignity.

"Where is Miss Hales?" he repeated in a louder key, turning to Francis.

"Miss Sylvia is talking to her troubadour," was the answer.

"Her what? Are you both mad?" said the irate Captain.

"She's very much engaged," said Louis; "we said we'd come and talk to you till she came back," and the boy sat down and crossed his legs like a man

of twenty. Francis followed suit, whilst the irate lover stood twirling his moustache and glaring at the twins.

"You're cool fish, I must say," he muttered, but the little ears were sharp.

"We're troubadours," said Louis; "it's a noble society, and if you join you have to be very polite to everybody, and not use bad words and not tell lies, and——"

"Thank you, that's enough. How long will this other troubadour keep Miss Hales?"

"I expect they'll have a lot to say to each other," said Francis.

"Or he'll have a lot to say to her," corrected Louis. "Noble ladies don't say very much to troubadours; they give them their hands to kiss?"

"Is this a lunatic asylum?" asked the enraged Captain. "I've got something special to say to Miss Hales, and then I must go and catch my train." He made a step nearer the window and the twins jumped up and barred the way.

"You can only go across our dead bodies," said Louis.

"All the troubadours fight for each other."

"I wish you'd all kill each other," said the Captain with a hollow laugh, but he sank into the arm-chair to make the best of it. The twins didn't trust him, however. They telegraphed to each other,

"We must guard the window; if we don't he'll run out."

"What does that beastly troubadour want with her?" said the Captain.

The four blue eyes twinkled.

"We want to know, too, awfully bad," said Louis; "if we could we'd go and——"

"Oh, no," said Francis, "it isn't honourable to listen, is it, Mr. Captain?"

"You seem to do nothing else," said the Captain; "awful imps, I call you."

"The troubadours never call names," said Louis with dignity.

"Hang your troubadours! Look here, if you don't go and say that I can't wait any longer, and that Miss Hales must come at once, I'll——" He paused, uncertain how to end.

"What will you do?" said Francis kindly, as if very anxious to know.

"I'll spiflicate you, or run you through, or whatever is the proper death for a troubadour."

"Single combat, I think," said Louis; "you must fight with me."

"And me too," added Francis.

"It depends if you have a glove," said Louis. "One of the troubadours once picked up the glove of a princess and kissed it before giving it back to her."

"Yes, and he said: 'That hand I saw when the

glove was taken off has enslaved my heart.' Have you got a glove belonging to Miss Sylvia?" The Captain stared.

"Look here, you're either mad or fooling! You must go and give my message or—I'll go myself."

The four eyes telegraphed and the two heads nodded.

"I'll go," said Francis, "because I'm the youngest, but you must promise not to move; Louis will stay with you."

"I expect they're in the kitchen garden," said Louis, "it's very private there. You must cough rather loud, Francis."

"Of course," said Francis, "and I'll sing too. You know Blondel did." Then he swiftly disappeared, and Louis stood alone to guard the Captain.

Francis did cough and then sang "Gaily the Troubadour," but Sylvia had already risen and nearly fell over him. Her eyes were shining and her cheeks were very pink.

"Oh, Francis!" she exclaimed.

"Have you finished, Miss Sylvia, is it all right? The other one is awful cross because you didn't come back."

"Oh, you good troubadours," she said smiling. "I—I——"

"Do come quickly, Louis has to guard him all alone! Isn't Planty coming?"

"No, he—wouldn't."

"Why not?"

But the two were running, and no answer came. In another moment Sylvia herself stood in the window, but what a transformed Sylvia! However, the Captain was too full of himself to notice it.

"I declare, Sylvia, it's too bad to keep me waiting when you know I must go; do send these mad brats away."

"Oh, they are the Waycott twins, my very dear friends," she said still smiling.

"We'll go now," said Louis; his dignity was sorely insulted. "Pasha Jones is tired of waiting, too, I expect."

"No, no, don't go. Oh, Captain Kemp——" began Sylvia.

"Captain Kemp!" he muttered, "what do you mean, Sylvia?" He looked like a black thundercloud. The boys, however, retired round the corner, and he seized her hands and tried to kiss her, but she was a changed Sylvia. She drew back hastily.

"I have come to say 'no,' Captain Kemp."

"To say 'no'! Nonsense! A woman's 'no I suppose," he sneered.

"Yes, a woman's no, no, no. Thank you very much for having thought of me—again—but I'm engaged to another man."

"Engaged to another man, that's a lie! You told me you were free when I came."

"But I had an offer just now, and I've accepted

it—Louis! Francis!" The boys came running back, very proud to have been summoned so soon.

"Captain Kemp is going back to the station. Go and open the gate for him."

"Confound you all," muttered the Captain; seizing his hat he pushed Francis aside with one hand and Louis with the other, and strode away unaccompanied.

"That was a bad word, Miss Sylvia; your Captain isn't a good man."

"Oh, he isn't my Captain. Louis! Francis! I must tell you, Mr. Russell is really my troubadour now!"

"Oh! we thought so," said Louis nodding, and as if this news was no surprise to them.

"Is Planty pleased? We knew he wanted to serve you, because he has your glove, Miss Sylvia, in his pocket all the time."

"He dropped it out of his pocket at lesson-time the other day, and then he dropped his handkerchief over it to pretend. But we saw it, didn't we; Francis?"

"I should think so! Oh, Miss Sylvia, Planty's awfully nice; he's very true and honourable."

"But if he says something, you've got to do it. You won't mind, will you?"

"Pupsey changes sometimes, and says, 'Oh, well, you may,' but Planty never does."

"He never tells stories except——"

"Except when?" said Sylvia laughing. Her head seemed to be dancing with gladness.

"Well, we can't find the colour of it."

"The colour?"

"Well, it isn't a white, or black, or brown, or blue lie when you drop your handkerchief over a glove, but it's a sort of acting a fib, isn't it?"

"It is a blue one; it was to save my feelings, I expect."

The boys meditated on this, but were not quite satisfied. "I think it was because of *us*."

"We are so glad, and shall you go on living here, Miss Sylvia? And Planty could come and see you every day, as he's been doing lately."

"We haven't settled anything yet," she said; then she added, acting a lie again—"wasn't it funny, Mr. Russell came just when I wanted him?"

The boys were too delighted for words.

"We fetched him, Miss Sylvia, we did really."

"We told him you wanted him."

"And he took a book off the table to pretend you wanted it."

Sylvia laughed.

"It was Bradshaw! No, I didn't want it; I didn't want to travel."

"Perhaps it was to tell the Captain what train to go by."

"We must go home now; Pasha Jones is tired of waiting. He's very, very patient, Miss Sylvia.

Good-bye, we are so very, very glad. I'm going to tell Gan-Aunt Dove, she'll be very glad too. She's very partial to Planty; Mumsey says she likes the 'noble sex' best. Do you know that Louis calls her 'My dear Hope'?"

"She's awfully glad when I do; she smiles very nicely and gives me a sovereign."

The click of the gate was heard and the twins fled through the window, calling Pasha Jones. They came face to face with the Vicar.

"Well, troubadours, have you had adventures to-day."

"I should just think we have! You ask Miss Sylvia."

They disappeared, and the Vicar walked thoughtfully up his drive. He was rather weary and did not expect to find anything very cheering at home. To his astonishment Sylvia was in the porch to receive him. He had never seen her looking prettier, and there was a wonderful light in her blue eyes.

"Oh, Cecil! Those wonderful twins!"

"What have they been doing?"

"They've saved me from—one lover and gave me another!" The Vicar thought she was a little deranged. He was not aware that lovers were so plentiful at the Vicarage.

"What do you mean—imaginary lovers?"

"Oh, no. Wish me joy, dear Cecil, I know mother would be glad. I've promised to marry——"

"To marry!"

"Yes, to marry Mr. Russell."

"How extraordinary! My dear, I do wish you joy. He is a man you can depend on—a good man."

"Yes, but, Cecil, I very nearly said 'yes' to Arthur Kemp—the twins saved me." And then she told him all the story and the marvellous doings of the two troubadours.

CHAPTER XXV.

GREAT REJOICING.

It so happened that day that Toney and the Squire had gone in the motor to return a distant call; they were not back till six o'clock, and Toney, hurrying to her morning-room, found the twins waiting for her. They were both so much excited that they could at first hardly find words.

"Mumsey, we've been longing to see you."

"Did Pupsey drive or did you? Our Jim says you drive best."

"I began first. Well, what's your news, my troubadours?"

"Oh, Mumsey, Mr. Russell says will you 'scuse him at dinner, because he's particularly engaged."

"Is he dining out? Is it at Aidersfield?"

"Oh, no, Mumsey," They said it both together and very scornfully.

"Why not?"

"Because we told you—Troubadour Planty is particularly engaged."

"We've had such lovely adventures, and we fetched him, and the Captain was awful cross, and she called us to save her and——"

Toney thought the twins had taken leave of their senses.

"Who is 'she,' darlings?"

"Why, his lady-love, of course—Troubadour Planty's lady-love."

"Oh! Has he really got one?"

"Of course, Mumsey, we found her for him, and now he says, like Troubadour Albert: 'Never have I loved anyone as I love you.'"

"And, Mumsey, the lady answers: 'I promise you I will reward your love.'"

"My dears, your book is rather strong in its language."

"Oh, Mumsey, you don't understand; it's all true, isn't it Francis?"

"Yes, I expect Planty said that and Miss Sylvia said the other."

"Sylvia! Gracious stars! What do you mean?"

"It's all true, Mumsey, darling; if we hadn't been there, the Captain——"

"What Captain? Mr. Russell isn't a captain."

The twins laughed.

"No, the false lover is a captain, but we fetched Planty to save her. It's a wonder they didn't fight."

"I rather think Planty ran away. That wasn't quite right, was it?"

Toney was swimming in a sea of mystery. Were the boys romancing? But it was true Mr. Russell was out—a very unusual occurrence. And what was this about Sylvia—could it possibly be true? So far she had thought it was only the twins' game. Toney was still romantic. She sat down and questioned them in a judicial manner.

"Do you mean to say Mr. Russell is engaged to Sylvia Hales?"

"She's his lady-love now, and he's gone to see her, and we told him not to forget her glove."

"Oh, Mumsey, it's wonderful. Planty has been so lucky all the time; there was the glove and the bull and now the Captain."

"Not the old love, Captain Kemp?"

"Yes, she called him that. We heard him say, 'Will you say "yes"?' but we said Planty wanted her, so she never had time to say 'yes' to him. I 'specks she said 'yes' to Planty."

"And, oh, Mother, it's all our society, and Planty looks so smiling, and at tea-time he said: 'I'm very glad I joined your society, troubadours.'"

"Yes, he said that, Mother! and he was glad, it wasn't a white fib."

"He wasn't very glad, at first, I don't think."

"Well! I never heard anything so—so—romantic in my life!" Toney said, laughing heartily.

It was not till after dinner when the twins had gone to bed and they were drinking coffee in the drawing-room that Toney announced the news.

"Aunt Honoria, Lewis, guess what the twins have told me."

"That's asking too much," said Miss Honoria laughing.

"It's about Mr. Russell."

"Where is he, by the way? He left word he wasn't coming to dinner."

"The twins say—he's engaged to Sylvia Hales!"

"Sylvia Hales! Well, who would have thought it! Why, he's seen her for years and never seemed to notice her!"

"It's all the twins' doing with their new game! The old lover came back—according to our troubadours—and they make out they prevented her saying 'yes' to him, and got Planty to make her an offer."

"My dear Toney, they are all drawing a very long bow! Pray don't repeat this till——" began the Squire.

Happily at this moment the door opened and Mr. Russell appeared, and came boldly up to Toney.

"I must apologize, but——" There was no mistaking his face.

"I declare it's true! Oh, Mr. Russell, are you——"

"Toney!" interrupted the Squire in an agony.

"Yes, it's true, Sylvia has—consented."

"And was there a captain in it, or is it the imagination of the twins?"

"There was, but Sylvia told him she was—bespoken." Mr. Russell laughed.

"I'm so delighted," said Miss Honoria; "Sylvia has such a sweet nature. She was a good daughter, and she was only soured by that unfortunate love affair."

"She had her choice to-day," said Mr. Russell simply, "and she chose me." Toney was shaking his hand violently, and the Squire followed suit.

"We do wish you joy, but we can't spare you! Who marries you marries Stone House," cried Toney.

"Yes," said Mr. Russell smiling, "and the troubadours!"

Later on he retailed other particulars to Toney's sympathetic ears alone, and she couldn't help laughing till she cried over the part the twins had taken.

"Anyhow, Mrs. Waycott, it's true, I owe my happiness to them entirely, and all these years I had been blind."

"We won't tell anyone—outside the family," said Toney, "they wouldn't believe us; but, oh, Mr. Russell, Sylvia must live here till we build you a house on the Stone estate."

"It's too much," said Planty rather shyly.

"Oh, it's dreadfully selfish. Lewis says no one can manage the House as you can; and the wedding must be soon, because Mr. Hales is going."

"I've seen him and arranged it all. He is so glad Sylvia won't be left alone. She isn't fit to battle with the world; but just imagine, Mrs. Waycott, she gave up position and money for *me*."

"And she escaped a selfish brute for a man," said Toney decidedly. "Fancy coming to ask Sylvia directly his wife died and expecting her to say 'thank you kindly' for such affection!"

"I told her she was the first woman I have ever loved. I owe it to you, Mrs. Waycott, that I'm the least scrap worthy of her."

When Toney repeated this to her husband she made her comments:

"I can't believe it's 'His Royal Highness'! He's as humble as dust about Sylvia, and really she isn't half good enough for him."

"She always has been a bit of a goose," said the Squire smiling.

"I shouldn't wonder now if love didn't just glory her up. We'll have a first-class wedding, Lewis."

"And you will be happy," said the Squire laughing.

"I just about shall be, and the twins are to be the only attendants of the bride! Oh, Lewis!

you must draw the boys out on the Captain; it's real fun, only you mustn't laugh, because they take it so seriously."

A night's rest had only filled the twins with new delight and energy, and Mr. Russell did not feel altogether as happy at breakfast as he had been during tea.

"Planty, did you give her the glove or did you keep it?"

"You mustn't ask questions," said Toney, smothering her laughter.

"Oh, Mumsey!"—two deep sighs. "May we say, 'Didn't she like the book you took her?'"

"Yes, I think you may ask that."

"It was Bradshaw, Mumsey."

There was a general laugh round the table, and poor Mr. Russell blushed.

"I thought it was something else."

"Did you, Planty, really? We saw you snatch it up without looking."

"A penny," said the President sadly, "but we'll save it up for a wedding present. People always have wedding presents; Mumsey, what will you give Planty?"

"That wants thought, doesn't it, Mr. Russell?" said Toney.

"And you, boys?" said Miss Honoria.

"We gave him Miss Sylvia, Aunt Honoria, didn't we, Planty?"

It was the truth, but Planty didn't like to answer, so he turned the conversation.

"Sylvia says when she's married you shall be her pages."

"Of course, we'll hold the train, and, Mumsey, may we be dressed like real troubadours?"

"I don't know quite what that dress was."

"Great hats with feathers that swept the floor, Mumsey."

"And a velvet cloak on one side, and a guitar."

"I shan't be able to play mine," said Louis sadly.

"I dare say you'll learn how to twang the strings," said Toney.

"Oh, Mother!" said Francis, reproachfully.

"I'm going soon to Gan-Aunt Dove to tell her," said Louis, nodding his head. "We have a plan, she'll be awfully interested; Miss Crossman won't be. I don't believe I could get a troubadour who would accept Miss Crossman, Pupsey, unless you would."

"You must excuse me, Louis. I'm frightened to death of her"; and Francis murmured under his breath, "Poor Miss Crossman."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SPECIOUS BEGGAR.

"I PLEAD for a whole holiday in honour of the event," said Toney after breakfast. "I expect Mr. Russell will be very particularly engaged! Now, troubadours, I'll take you for a ride and finish up at Aldersfield House, because I must have a talk with Uncle Evas."

A whole holiday was not received with such unbounded fervour as it would have been with some boys; nevertheless, "a ride with Mumsey" was not to be despised. She knew where some lovely jumps could be had, and often joined in a point-to-point race. That was glorious, and the best of it was Mumsey enjoyed it as much as her sons.

Joseph came running up to take the steeds, having watched the trio trotting up the Aldersfield drive. Every one loving a horse and its rider always did watch Toney on horseback, and the twins were equally attractive. Toney was secretly very proud

of the horsemanship of her sons, though Uncle Evas said they reminded him of two circus riders.

"How do, Brother Joseph?" exclaimed Louis. "Have you kept all the rules or have you got any pennies for me?"

"You've got to be very honest about it, Joseph. Mr. Russell owes us several pennies," said Francis.

"But we shall keep them for his wedding present."

Toney could not keep a grave face, especially as "Brother Joseph" looked very guilty.

"I'd better reckon up, Master Louis," he said. The President looked sad.

"We must get a money-box on purpose for you and put 'Brother Joseph's fibs' on it."

"I suppose you will have to, Master Louis, but that dratted boy Chawles do make the words slip out."

Toney cut further confession short.

"Let Joseph take the horses, and, Francis, you lead Judy for him and Louis will go to his Gan-Aunt Dove."

"I'll help Joseph to reckon," said Francis cheerfully, and Toney ran up the steps followed by Louis. Mr. Mills was already at the door.

"Is her ladyship at home, Mr. Mills?" asked Louis, "because I want particularly to see her, and Mrs. Waycott wants particularly to see Sir Evas,

and we mustn't be in the same room because I've got secrets to tell her." The President was quite out of breath and had very rosy cheeks.

Toney nodded her head to ratify her son's request. Mr. Mills kept his countenance. "Sir Evas has just gone to his study, ma'am, and her ladyship is in the morning-room. She is not very well this morning."

"Go very quietly, Louis, and say I will come to fetch you. I dare say you will cheer her up."

"Of course I shall, Mumsey. Gan-Aunt always says I do her good."

Louis followed Mr. Mills upstairs. Toney rushed to the study; she had never learnt the composure of a Vere de Vere.

"Oh, ducky Uncle, I'm so glad to find you alone, and one of the unemployed."

Sir Evas was seated at his writing-table littered with papers and a pen was in his hand.

"One of the unemployed indeed! I like that. Toney! You do look well. What a colour! Been riding? I call that unemployed if you like!"

"It was to free Mr. Russell. Oh, imagine, Uncle, he's engaged to Sylvia Hales, and he looks so sheepish to-day and has taken the disease very badly, and just imagine she had two offers yesterday and the twins somehow selected Planty for her!"

"You do romance well, Toney," said Sir Evas,

leaving his writing-table and throwing himself into a big arm-chair.

"It's truth, gospel truth, and if you catechize the twins you'll hear something to your advantage, but anyhow I've come to beg."

"To beg? Why, you refused the other day!"

"Yes, but you see this wedding, Uncle! I want five hundred pounds just to do it handsome, trousseau and a lot of things, and then I must do up some rooms for them till we can build a house on the Stone estate."

"Defend us! You do set the pace. Five hundred pounds!"

"Just for the moment, dear ducky; you see I'm really stony broke. Look at my shoes; I ought to get a new pair, but I put it off!" and Toney exhibited a somewhat worn pair of shoes. "Money does melt, and there's so much wanted, I don't like to break into the travelling fund. Miss Phipps must have a change soon, she's such an angel! She and Mrs. Harris could have a jaunt next month together. Dr. Harris is rather trying, Uncle. You ought to live with him a week and then you would know!"

"Thanks. I'll choose Captain Grant. The Captain's always smiling and wouldn't expect much conversation," said Sir Evas.

"Now, don't tease. Is it five hundred you can find for me just directly? There's no time to

shilly-shally, for Sylvia wants mothering at once as the wedding will be very soon."

Sir Evas was rubbing his hands with great satisfaction. That blessed coal-mine, and Toney, luckily, knew nothing about it, only now and then blindly signing what her uncle put before her.

"If you were to be quite civil, Toney, I'd see what could be done, but I think you must promise to get a new pair of shoes first. You know what your aunt says, 'A lady is known by her boots and her gloves!'"

They both laughed and then Toney added, "By the way, I'm sorry Aunt Dove is not well; she's not been looking the thing for a long time, and Miss Crossman gets more tyrannical."

"I do try to suggest change, but it doesn't do, Toney, she fears some one worse."

"I've sent Louis up to her. He always cheers her, but my Lewis doesn't like the idea of her making the boy heir to Aldersfield, Uncle Evas."

"I wanted it to be Francis, but Melina is determined. It doesn't do to contradict her now she's not well. Well, I suppose I must find the five hundred pounds just for that milk-and-water Sylvia."

"You forget 'His Royal Highness'; you'll see he'll cure her, because he thinks she's perfect so she will have to be."

"He must have saved a good bit, perhaps——"

"No, Uncle Evas, don't think it. We can't do

without him. The twins would get beyond us, and you don't know the blessing he is as a secretary! He never worries me about things now. No, we'll build him a house and call him 'Warden,' or something like that, and you'll see how Sylvia will develop. Seven hundred a year with the house! I say, ducky Uncle, can we do it? It's no use sniffing over an extra two hundred."

"Toney!" Sir Evas was thinking of the money pouring in from the coal-mine. Yes, he could very well afford it, but he mustn't give in too easily or she would smell a rat!

"You would skin a flint, Toney!"

"There's a fearful power of money-grubbing in you, ducky Uncle. It just frightens me; I'll have to make you a Franciscan. You must possess nothing but one coat and one cloak."

"Won't you throw in a pair of pants, Toney? Climate's changed since your St. Francis' time." He went to his desk and wrote a cheque.

"Thanks, ducky Uncle. You do hear reason, I must say that for you! Now I'll go ahead. Sort of thank-offering for all Mr. Hales' work, and dear Mrs. Hales' goodness to me when I was a kiddy and——"

"I don't want any more reasons, Toney. Come upstairs and see Melina."

The two who understood each other so completely walked up the stairs, and Sir Evas opened the door

softly. Lady Dove was lying on a very big old-fashioned sofa and Louis was sitting by her side, cap in hand and with crossed legs, saying:

"It's all true, my dear Hope; and what wedding present will you give Mr. Russell?"

"What that child's allowed to say beats me!" muttered Sir Evas.

"What an extraordinary story about Sylvia Hales, Antonia!" began Lady Dove.

"Oh, scrumptious, Aunt Dove."

"Gan-Aunt thinks it's very romantic, Mumsey; and we've been consulting together about a wedding present, haven't we?"

"Plantagenet Russell always was a perfect gentleman," said Lady Dove. "He always knew how to treat ladies. Still he could have made a better match than Sylvia Hales."

"Oh, no, Gan-Aunt. It's love that makes the troubadours so nice. One of them says in our book: 'I will fly to my fair one. She is in all I love, and nothing without her is delightful!' I 'spect Planty feels like that; don't you think so, Uncle Evas?"

"Yes, I expect he does."

"I 'spect you felt like that once about Gan-Aunt Dove, didn't you, before you married her?"

Sir Evas fled, and Tony plunged into the subject of wedding presents, as Lady Dove remarked:

"I will give Mr. Russell a chest of plate; left to

himself he would buy some German plated stuff which no gentleman should look at."

"Oh, that will be very handsome, Aunt Dove."

"Evas can take Louis to London to choose it."

"Oh, Gan-Aunt, do you mean it? How very, very good you are; we'll have such pretty patterns, and T. P. on it for Troubadour Party."

"I think that P. R. would be better," said Lady Dove, smiling.

"Come, Louis, you will tire your Gan-Aunt," said Toney.

Louis got down from his chair.

"I don't think I tire her; it's Miss Crossman. Good-bye, my dear Hope," and Louis knelt down and kissed the withered hand that lay on the silk Duvet.

"Good-bye, my boy!" she said softly; and as Toney walked away on tiptoe, something filled her eyes, and she had to brush it away with the back of her hand.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE LAKE.

Toney sent the boys back alone; they would go past the lake and on through the gap and so home, whilst she went to the Vicarage to congratulate Sylvia. They separated with wavings of their hands and shouts of "Tally Ho!" Toney rode on with a smile on her lips debating many things in her mind. Was she too much blessed? Was Uncle Evas able to afford all the money she was spending? What would Aunt Dove say if she knew? Where should she order Sylvia's trousseau? etc.

She trotted quite gently down the familiar park drive. What memories the place awoke in her? What a wonderful vision of dear old General Stone's first visit, and all that had resulted from it. Was she really worthy of the trust he had reposed in her by leaving her his large fortune?

Toney's meditations had never been very lengthy, for "up and doing" had been her maxim; and as

she walked her horse up the Vicarage drive she laughed to herself, remembering the doings of the twins in respect of this engagement. Mr. Hales saw her, and came out of his study with a smile on his lips. The gardener took the horse, and she exclaimed :

" Is Sylvia at home ? Isn't this delightful news, Mr. Hales ? "

" I am more glad than I can say ! The thoughts of my mission work were marred by the idea that Sylvia would be rendered homeless."

" I've come to be a mother to her ! Look here, Mr. Hales, I undertake the trousseau in memory of dear Mrs. Hales. Don't let's have words over it. It's quite decided, and as a secret I tell you that Aunt Dove is going to provide their plate. She's doing it handsome ; you know she was always partial to Mr. Russell."

" It's much too much," murmured the Vicar. " You are not rich now, you must remember."

Toney laughed.

" To say the truth I've begged the money, but that's all right ! Oh, Mr. Hales, the Stone estate will build them a lovely little house, and you'll see it when you come back from the heathen. I know you'll be as poor as when you started."

The Vicar laughed.

" I'm never clever at making money."

" Of course not, you'll be a real Franciscan, and

come back with nothing but what you stand up in! I think its just lovely of you, and I do envy you, but when Francis is grown up he'll follow in your footsteps; I've dedicated him, you know, to the poor."

"I hear Herr Mayer was astonished at his talent."

"Yes, he talked to us a long time about it; I wish I could understand it all, but anyhow that will be a real thing for him to offer, won't it?"

"It will indeed—to the glory and honour of God."

"I can't think what Stone House will do without you," sighed Toney.

"You'll try and put in a word as to the choice of my successor, won't you?" said the Vicar pathetically. He did not trust Lady Dove very much.

"You bet! Oh, I mean, I've already made tracks that way. I want the Fabers to come and she'll help me with my sons, and I can keep my eye on her daughter, and Mr. Faber is very saintly, you know."

"Ah! but Lady Dove?"

"Of course she won't hear of it, I know beforehand, but—why there's Sylvia and—Mr. Russell!"

Toney's sharp eyes had caught a glint of a white dress, and she ran across the lawn and caught the lovers blushing and looking very guilty.

"We had run away thinking it was a visitor!" said Mr. Russell, and Sylvia added;

"Oh, Toney! I feel as if I didn't deserve anything good—and I've got him."

Mr. Russell was so humble that he could not find any words to contradict her with, and she certainly made a fascinating picture with happiness illuminating her pretty face, from which all the discontent had entirely disappeared.

"I've come as a mother, so you must give me half an hour in which to make a list, as we will give the trousseau—your brother agrees—and as a great secret——"

"Oh, we ought not to have it," said Mr. Russell, smiling.

"I'm like Uncle Evas—I can't keep secrets. Aunt Dove is giving you a mountain of plate. Really and truly I prefer German silver, but real silver is better if you ever want to visit 'Uncle'; and the Stone estate will build you a Warden's house. There now, come along, Sylvia."

"Then I'll go to Stone House and come back later," said Mr. Russell, striding off. But suddenly he retraced his steps.

"Mrs. Waycott, where are my brother troubadours?"

"Gone home through Aldersfield Park and the gap."

"They are safe that way?"

Toney didn't heed these words, because of course they were safe in the park, but she linked her arm

into Sylvia's, prepared for a good talk, and very soon she was making notes of dozens, and of colours for dresses.

"It's too good of you, Toney. Do you remember how horrid I was to you when you first came? You always return good for evil."

"Oh, no, there's Aunt Dove now, I never seem to do anything she likes except"—Toney laughed—"except being the mother of Louis! It's just awfully pathetic how she really loves that child, though I've often thought Aunt Dove's heart was made of flint. You see, I was all wrong, Sylvia! I guess we often are when we have decided some one's quite, quite unconverted! But, I say, Sylvia, are you quite, quite sure you don't want the Captain? You won't go back on Mr. Russell, will you? Planty has taken the disease so badly: I never could have believed it of him, but still—if—you did jib he'd just collapse."

Sylvia's blue eyes opened wide.

"I don't wonder at your saying that, but, do you know, I felt like some one who had a black bandage over their eyes and couldn't see the blue sky, and now it's been torn off and I can't think how all this long time I could have loved darkness instead of light! Don't be unhappy about that—I feel quite, quite sure, and, oh! so happy and safe."

"Scrumptious!" exclaimed Toney. "Now I

must scoot. Luncheon is sacred to the twins, and they are so bursting with words just now."

"I can never tell you what I feel about them. I think sometimes God takes a child by the hand and makes him work miracles."

"I think—I think, Sylvia, you're a miracle. Good-bye," and immediately Mrs. Waycott sprang on to her horse, and was soon trotting away round the road towards Waycott Hall. In looking back, Sylvia always recalled the lovely sky and the spring flowers on the beds, and the shining coat of Toney's horse and her shining eyes, and then a great black pall descended on the scene.

When the twins left their mother they took one of the smaller paths through the park which led five minutes away from the ornamental sheet of water. From thence they could turn to their left and make straight for the gap. The ponies were rather lively after their feed of corn in the Aldersfield stables, and the boys had no breath for conversation. Presently they pulled up, and Francis, rising in his stirrups, exclaimed:

"Look, Louis, whatever is that near the punt-house? It looks like children."

Louis looked eagerly that way too.

"It is some children," he exclaimed. "I wonder what they are doing there? Gan-Aunt doesn't allow any of the village children to go off the path."

"It's some of the children coming to fetch milk from Aldersfield," said Francis.

"We ought to tell them they must not go there," said Louis sternly.

"I don't know, Louis; you know, Mumsey doesn't let us go to the lake either," said Francis.

"But Gan-Aunt doesn't allow the children to go there, so oughtn't I to tell them, because I'm her troubadour."

It was a case of conscience, and both boys paused to consider the matter.

It was during this pause that something happened, for the little girl and the little boy, who had evidently got hold of the punt, were having rare fun jumping down into it and then climbing back along the edge of it. All at once there was a terrible shriek followed by a splash, and then a little white figure, which one moment before had balanced itself on the edge of the punt, had disappeared in the water.

"Francis!"

"Louis!"

Simultaneously the twins turned their ponies' heads and galloped to the edge of the water, then they threw themselves off and rushed along the miniature landing-stage. Another terrible scream came from the little boy, who was leaning on the edge of the punt, calling out "Sally, Sally!" and sobbing and holding out his hand in vain.

Then he suddenly beheld the twins and pointed despairingly at the water.

"Sally's gone in; do save her, do take her out." He seemed paralysed with fear.

"Where is she?" said Francis, beginning to take off his coat.

"There's Sally, there! there!" An empty tin can was floating quite out of reach and a white struggling shape reappeared. Louis stepped in front of his brother.

"Francis, don't; I can swim and you can't; stay with the boy. Where's the big oar?"

Louis had already thrown his coat off and at the same instant had stepped on the edge of the punt just as the little white bundle reappeared on the surface of the water, though now drifting several yards away.

"It's locked up. Oh, Louis! can you?—let me come too."

"No, please, Francis, go to Aldersfield quick on the pony, suppose I can't reach her! Oh, go quick!"

Francis couldn't leave Louis.

"Run, little boy, quick," he said, "go and tell some one to come, get on the pony if you can ride. The boy obeyed, and fortunately he had often ridden bare back, and sobbing as if his heart would break, he ran up to a pony and galloped away. At the same moment Louis plunged in. Francis rushed to the boat-house. Alas! it was securely shut;

then he too felt as if he must follow Louis when, at that moment Pasha Jones rushed up to him.

"Oh! Pasha Jones! Pasha Jones, go and help him. Oh, Louis, Louis, where's the girl! He's got to her, no! he can't catch hold of her! Oh, Pasha Jones, go at once!" and Pasha Jones understood and plunged into the water.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN THE SHADOW.

Francis rushed back to the punt and ran along the edge till he stood at the very end, straining his eyes towards Louis, who could swim like a fish and who had now reached the spot where the child had a second time disappeared. At that moment she came up again and with one more stroke Louis had reached her.

"Oh! Louis, Louis!" shouted his brother triumphantly, not knowing he was calling out, and not knowing too that now was the moment of greatest danger for his brother. The child was not quite unconscious: she could still struggle and she clutched at her small rescuer with the clutch of despair. To his horror Francis saw that her attempt to drag his brother down was almost successful, and yet Louis bravely held his head above water and tried to tow her back to the punt, but in spite of his exertions the terrible weight was dragging him under, and he now shouted, "Francis! Francis!"

At this moment Pasha Jones reached the sinking pair and Louis had enough presence of mind to see that the dog must carry the sinking weight and not him. "Good Pasha, take her." The dog obeyed and clutched at the white bundle, but seemed to pause for his little master, who, relieved of some of the weight, tried to free himself from the clutching fingers. Pasha Jones did not pause long, and, turning, swam back to shore, and thus forcibly liberated Louis. But his strength was terribly lessened with the fearful struggle he had had, yet he still bravely struck out, and to Francis' joy he saw his plucky brother swimming back towards him.

"Louis, Louis, it's only a little way, oh!"

With a fearful splashing Pasha Jones reached the shore and put down his white bundle, then dashed in again as Francis urged him to Louis' help. Francis was still on the punt as Pasha Jones neared it, but at that minute Francis heard a feeble call. "Francis, Francis, help!" He did not hesitate again, but threw himself into the water and successfully clutched Pasha Jones. With this help he managed to swim and to keep his head above water.

"Louis, Louis, I'm coming, oh!" For at that moment Louis raised his arm for one instant above his head, then sank.

But other help was coming. A horse was dashing towards the lake; Joseph on the pony was

lashing it furiously forward, and at last threw himself off and dashed on to the punt, and he too flung himself into the water, where Francis, still clinging to Pasha Jones, had managed to seize Louis when he rose to the surface. But the strain was too great for the child, and as Jim reached them, Louis had sunk again, but Pasha Jones had firm hold of Francis. Joseph took only an instant to dive below the surface and clutch the now unconscious Louis, though without Pasha Jones he could not have rescued both boys. Francis had not lost consciousness and could still obey as Joseph cried, "Hold me by my collar so I can carry Master Louis. Don't be afraid."

Who had told Toney? How it was she reached the edge just as Joseph, struggling to his feet, put first Louis on the ground, then Francis, she never knew. But already she had thrown herself from her horse and was kneeling on the grass by the little white bundle of a girl even before her two sons were laid beside her; instinct told her what had happened.

As if by magic many persons now came running up: the lodge-keeper's wife was the first. She had been passing along the path when she heard the shouts and had run to give help to Mrs. Waycott, who exclaimed:

"Put her on her face, begin to move her arms. Oh, Louis, Louis!"

Francis opened his eyes, he had not really fainted, only he was a little dazed.

"Mumsey, he did it, he saved her!" he gasped.

Again as if by magic Doctor Latham appeared.

"Thank heaven! The boy met me. Mrs. Waycott look after Francis, this is my work. I've ordered a carriage. Mrs. Hill, unfasten the girl's things so. Now, kind people, don't press round. Artificial respiration must be tried at once. No, we mustn't move them yet."

An awful silence succeeded; the doctor gave Mrs. Hill directions at the same time as he worked himself, and Toney sent messages to Waycott Hall for rugs and the motor and scribbled a note to her housekeeper. She never asked any questions, and in a very short time others came up and stood round in deepest silence. Now and then only a whisper was heard; then a louder sound, "Make way, it's the Squire," and pale as death Lewis Waycott ran up.

"Latham, you here, thank God! Here's the motor." He rushed to it and brought back some rugs, and Jim, who had driven it, handed some brandy to the doctor.

"The little girl's coming to, sir," said Mrs. Hill suddenly.

"Good, go on, don't stop yet, so, move her arms more evenly. Mrs. Waycott, take Francis home, he's all right. It's quite safe."

Toney looked at her husband.

"Lewis, you go—I—I can't."

Francis had his eyes shut. The shock had been too great for him, but not the immersion.

"Jim, come with me," said Lewis. They lifted up Francis and took him off, Pasha Jones following.

"Come back for the little girl," said Dr. Latham. "She's very little the worse, oddly enough."

Lewis nodded. Then Toney went to help Dr. Latham. Louis was deadly pale and perfectly motionless: there seemed to her eyes to be no sign of life in him. Her own heart seemed to stop beating, but she obeyed orders mechanically.

"Do as I do. Can you do it, Mrs. Waycott?"

"Yes," said Toney, and she clenched her teeth.

"Who took him out?"

"Joseph."

"Where is he?"

"He's gone to Aldersfield to change; he was very wet."

"If we could get some hot bottles."

"Aldersfield is the nearest. Will some one go for some? There's my horse," said Toney.

Several people started off running and some one got on Mrs. Waycott's horse. Above, the sky was very blue, with great floating white clouds in it. Far away came the sound of the Aldersfield luncheon bell.

Toney stopped. "Louis! Louis! Sonnie! Oh, Dr. Latham, he doesn't move yet!"

"We must not stop a moment. I've sent for Dr. Spenser from Winchley. If he is anywhere within call he will come. Ah! this is his motor, good! he'll bring some other restoratives. Mrs. Waycott, let him take your place, please."

"Must I?"

"Yes." Toney rose, and immediately, without a word, Dr. Spenser took her place. He had heard the facts on the way, though, of course, not the right facts.

"One of the twins is drowned, and the other and little Sally Spriggs is saved. Tommy Spriggs and she got playing on the punt, as was forbidden, and little Louis Waycott jumped in after her to save her."

Dr. Latham gave his colleague a look as he knelt on the grass; the look meant, "Is there any chance?" The other shrugged his shoulders, but not one instant did he stop his movements.

Toney walked quickly towards some people who now came running up. They carried more blankets and some hot tins. She rushed back with a hot blanket; it had been wrapped round the boiling tins.

"Ah!" said the doctor, "that's right! Wrap up his feet, Mrs. Waycott, so; take off anything wet. That will make all the difference."

Toney looked up and spoke to the crowd.

"Dear friends, collect some wood and light a fire close here. Sir Evas would wish it."

What a blessing for her "dear friends": at least now they could do something to help, and no one but Toney had thought of lighting a fire! She quickly rubbed the small icy cold feet and bit her lip till the blood started.

Half an hour—three-quarters passed. But now there was a roaring fire with sticks gathered as if by magic from the Waycott woods near the gap, and the smoke rolled away towards Waycott Hall; but the heat was all around the unconscious form of the boy.

"He's so strong," said Toney, looking up into Dr. Latham's face.

"Yes, it's all in his favour."

"His feet are getting warm, I think."

"Ah! that hot tin—by the way, Lady Dove must not know."

Toney did not seem to hear the words, and silence fell again on the workers.

"He could swim so well, why did he sink?" said Toney as if to herself.

"The girl must have dragged him down."

The motor had come up again and Lewis rushed back. He looked ghastly.

"Well," he dared not say, "is there any hope?" To himself he said "there is none."

"Doctor Spenser is doing wonders," said Dr.

Latham. "Mrs. Waycott would not have had the strength—it wants a professional hand, and the fire was a brilliant idea."

"I see," said the Squire, but he didn't look down. "What shall I do now?"

"How are the—others?" said Toney, she spoke unnaturally calmly.

"Both doing well. The little girl is wonderful. They are well looked after."

"Good," said Dr. Latham, but he never stopped in his movements. Toney still knelt and chafed the little feet.

"Ah!" suddenly exclaimed Dr. Latham. "Excuse me, Mrs. Waycott, will you move? Spenser, lift him so. Now for one instant." He knelt and listened at his heart. "Ah! that's good! Spenser, listen."

"It's true! but we must not leave off, Latham."

"Not for a moment." Some one had heard this; then a swelling murmur of "Thank God! thank God!" was heard, and the men uncovered their heads as if in church. The sound rose and fell, reaching the outside circle. Toney found herself clasped by her husband's arms because, suddenly, she was unable to stand alone.

"Waycott, take her home," said Dr. Latham quietly; "she must get everything ready at home. We are not yet out of the wood."

CHAPTER XXIX.

SUDDEN NEWS.

Lady Dove was eating a tempting little lunch in her sitting-room, and now and then she smiled over the recollections of Louis' visit. He would certainly grow up a gentleman of the old school; he had, besides, enough brains to make him a distinguished member of society, and she was determined to persuade Evas to make a will in his favour. Francis was well enough, but Louis was far beyond him. Then there came a recollection of the boy's sweet ways with her. He was not afraid of her; she really believed he loved her for her own sake. "My dear Hope," she mentally repeated; would anyone but Louis have found such a name for her? He was not enough appreciated at Waycott, and Antonia was always trying to bring Francis forward and telling people of his wonderful musical talent. Such rubbish; gentlemen did not need musical talents, for it made them at once into professionals!

Into this pleasing meditation Miss Crossman

broke noisily, though Lady Dove had constantly said when she was not well she wished to be left to herself during her meal-times.

"Well, I declare, such a piece of work!"

"Crossman, I will not be startled like this. How often have I told you that I will not be disturbed at my meals in my own sitting-room?"

"I shall be obliged, Lady Dove, by your giving me my title."

"When you behave as a lady I shall give you a lady's title; now, pray, retire."

"Oh, very well; I thought you would like to hear about poor little Louis Waycott."

"What are you saying?" said Lady Dove, actually rising and turning deadly white; but Miss Crossman was making for the door and had her back turned towards her.

"Come back, Crossman: what are you saying about—about Louis?"

"You ordered me out of the room, so——"

"Speak, woman," Lady Dove almost screamed

"Please don't excite yourself, Lady Dove, they say the boy has tumbled into the pond and got drowned." Miss Crossman, receiving no answer, turned and was shocked to see the effect of her words. Lady Dove still stood rigid and deadly pale, grasping the back of an arm-chair, the one Louis had sat in such a short time ago. The companion added very hastily, "But I don't suppose it is true;

Joseph has gone down and I think also every servant in the house, so the luncheon has not been brought in."

"Go—go—and fetch Sir Evas," said Lady Dove in a low, muttering voice.

"You had better lie down, Lady Dove. I don't know where he is." At this moment, however, Sir Evas entered the room; he had come in from the woods at the back of the house and knew nothing.

"Hulloa, Melina! What's the matter? What's come to the household, no lunch on the table and not a soul about. Miss Crossman, Lady Dove looks very—upset." Sir Evas thought he had interrupted a battle royal.

Lady Dove sank down. She was still staring in front of her, but her husband's presence seemed to restore her power of speech.

"Evas—Louis, little Louis is in the pond. Go at once—bring him here, we can nurse him—only wants warmth. Go, go, please go at once."

Sir Evas stared too, but only for a moment.

"Some one told me he was drowned in the ornamental water," said Miss Crossman, "but I dare say it's exaggerated." She was really frightened at the effect of her words.

"Good heavens!" He turned and ran downstairs and was out of the hall door without further questioning. From the top of the steps he looked

out far away towards the water, and there, sure enough, he saw a black mass of people and smoke rising from some fire. His hand shook violently; how should he get there, right out there quickly? He could not wait for his horse to be saddled. With the exclamation of "My poor Toney!" he rushed on, now and then running a few yards quicker than he had done for years.

He arrived just as Toney was being led to the motor. He hurried towards her, but for a few moments he believed the worst report. Louis was lying there dead in that black group of people. He was by Toney's side before he knew anything else.

"Toney! My poor Toney!"

Toney turned and threw her arms round his neck and burst out crying like a child. It was the relief of the awful pent-up feelings of the last hour.

"Uncle Evas, Uncle Evas!"

"My poor Toney. Lewis—how?"

Lewis, pale as death, was quite calm again.

"I must take her home, there is so much to do; they are bringing him back home in a few minutes."

"You must bear up, my poor Toney, you must be brave." Then Toney realized he imagined the worst, just as she had imagined it during that long, long agony.

"Oh, Uncle Evas! No, no, no, he's alive, don't think—God has spared us."

"Yes, God has spared us the worst—so far Come back with us, Uncle Evas."

Sir Evas shook his head.

"Not yet. Melina is so upset; that fool of a Crossman told her the worst. I must go back at once—Melina looked—so—so upset."

"Go back quick, and tell her he's breathing. Oh! Uncle Evas we thought——"

"Come, dearest," said her husband, "we have much to get ready," and he put her gently into the motor. Sir Evas paused a moment by the black circle; though they made room for him he could not see Louis.

"Latham—he's alive? How the dickens did it happen?"

Dr. Latham nodded; he had no time to talk. It was the people around who told him.

"Master Louis jumpd in to save little Sally Spriggs, Sir Evas; he never thought of himself, and he did save her too, but Master Francis jumped in too, and the big dog kept him up, Sir Evas, till Joseph came."

"He's his mother's own son, Sir Evas."

"He'll do now, Sir Evas, if they can keep it up."

"We're mighty proud of him."

"Sally's mother went into high strikes when she heard of it, Sir Evas."

"The doctors say he won't be out of danger for a good bit."

"Make way, they're going to lift him into the carriage."

"Mrs. Waycott kept up wonderful, Sir Evas."

"Thank you, thank you, my friends," said Sir Evas, hardly knowing what he said, and setting his face towards home he hurried on. Melina must be told at once. How ill she looked, she was so very fond of little Louis. He had never known her look like that at the receipt of any news. He had hardly gone many yards when he ran up against Mr. Russell and Sylvia Hales. They both looked scared, for they had only just heard the terrible report.

"Sir Evas, Louis? Tell me!" exclaimed Mr. Russell.

"They say he's dead," gasped Sylvia.

"No, no, utter nonsense; was very nearly gone, but luckily Latham and Spenser were there very soon. He's coming round. Russell, you go to Waycott, will you? And, Miss Hales, will you come with me and sit with Lady Dove a bit? Miss Crossman gave her a horrid fright."

"Yes, go, Sylvia," said Mr. Russell, "you can do nothing at Waycott. Oh, if only I had been there! if——"

"No, no, it's no use looking back. Good-bye, my dear fellow, you will help them. There's poor Francis to think of; he was in the water too, brave little chaps."

It was fortunate Sir Evas had brought Sylvia

with him, for they found Lady Dove prostrate on the sofa; no one had thought of her; she had never given sympathy to others and now she had been forgotten. Sir Evas opened the door gently.

"All right, Melina. Louis is—not drowned. So senseless of the people to say so—quite idiotic; he's coming round."

Lady Dove sat up on the sofa. The grey look had not left her face.

"Don't let Crossman come near me, Evas: she'll be the death of me. How did she dare tell me?"

"Oh, well, she only repeated what she heard. Here's Sylvia Hales come to tell you the particulars."

"Louis is alive, and Mr. Russell has gone to Waycott. He never knew; he's in despair that he was not there. He swims so well himself. So did Louis, but of course the little fellow couldn't bear the strain too long. The girl dragged him down, but Sally's brother ran for Joseph."

"How dare those children go near the water. I have forbidden it," said Lady Dove, sinking back on her sofa.

The luncheon bell rang, the servants had returned to their duties, and the housekeeper knocked at the door.

"Come in, Norris," said Lady Dove. "Why didn't they bring the boy here? We could have nursed

him. If his mother had not let the boys go home alone this would never have happened."

Mrs. Norris told a long story with varied particulars to Lady Dove and Sylvia Hales. She had heard it from Joseph and from the little boy and the crowd around him. "They say, my lady, that Master Louis was quite a hero; he never thought of himself and Master Francis went in too to try and save his brother."

Lady Dove listened to all the story and asked a few questions, but Mrs. Norris noticed how ill she looked and suggested her ladyship should go to bed.

"Yes, I will. I feel rather done up, Norris. The news was too sudden. That silly Crossman startled me. Tell my maid to come to my room. When I am in bed, perhaps you will kindly read to me, Miss Hales? I really can't bear the sight of that woman just yet. Mr. Russell will come and tell us how Louis is getting on, I know. He is always considerate and I must congratulate you very much on your engagement to him."

Sylvia remained all the afternoon and read and talked to Lady Dove; she knew Planty would wish it, but she too was anxious to hear his footsteps outside. Suppose—— No, no, she wouldn't suppose the worst. Louis must live; no one could spare him, least of all Lady Dove.

CHAPTER XXX.

SUSPENSE.

Never had two villages shared so much anxiety over the safety of one young life as did the people on the two estates of Dove and Waycott. It was not only for the boy's sake; but "Miss Toney's twins," as some of the old people called them, seemed to belong personally to each cottager because of their love for her. And further, the boy had become a hero, and hero-worship had set in. Every detail of the event had been elicited by the people from Francis and the other two children. Strange to say, the girl was very little the worse for her serious adventure; Francis having been in the water so much less time was also none the worse bodily, but he had received such a mental shock that they tried to keep him quiet in a bed in his father's dressing-room.

In vain, the constant moan of "I must see Louis" made the doctors yield, and on the promise of not speaking above a whisper he was put into his own

bed, where he could lie and look at his brother, and though Louis was still unconscious it was noticed he was quieter after Francis had returned.

There was no disguising the fact that Louis hung between life and death. His restoration to life had been almost a miracle, and only the prompt action of the two doctors had rekindled the lingering spark. On the day following the accident he was found to be in a state of high fever, and after a short time the doctors pronounced this to be due to pneumonia. Would the high fever quench the rekindled spark of life again ? Everything that money and loving care could do was being done, but the doctors could not, dared not, hold out hopes that might prove false. His rambling talk was always of that water, and always ended in agonizing calls to Francis ! Francis !

At last Francis could bear it no longer ; when no one was watching him he jumped from his bed and ran to his brother.

" Louis, Louis, here I am ; it's all right, dear troubadour." Toney was going to speak sternly, but the agonizing call was suddenly hushed, as Louis felt the familiar hand of his brother on him, and Dr. Latham smiled.

" Ah ! " he said, " we had not thought of that." Then at his own request Francis was dressed and sat crouching close to the bed ready when the call came of " Francis, Francis," to jump up and make the same answer :

"I'm here, Louis; it's all right, dear troubadour."

But no one could persuade Toney to leave the boy's bedside except for a few snatches of food.

"I'm so strong," she pleaded to her husband; "don't send me away, Lewis; I couldn't bear it," and Lewis Waycott gave in because he knew that he too could not bear to be long away from his eldest born.

Thus five awful days and nights passed, and on the sixth Dr. Latham looked graver; the boy's strength could not withstand the strain much longer, and yet he never stopped his unremitting care.

On the evening of the sixth day a close carriage drove up to Waycott, and Toney happened at that moment to be in the hall, having gone to pick some violets for Louis' room, when the door opened and Sylvia ran up to her.

"Oh, Toney, Lady Dove is here, and she has brought Dr. Golding from London!"

"Dr. Golding, the king's doctor!"

"Yes, may they come in? Dr. Latham can't mind; Lady Dove insisted."

Lady Dove was handed out and she introduced the celebrated physician.

"Dr. Golding, this is Mrs. Waycott, the mother of my great-nephew. I telegraphed, Antonia, to—to—satisfy myself."

Toney had unshed tears in her eyes; she hid her face in the violets.

"Thank you! How kind of you. Do come up. It will be an honour for Dr. Latham—but we quite trust him, you know, Dr. Golding."

"I told you it was for my own satisfaction, Antonia. Etiquette is not to be considered in such cases."

"Don't tire yourself, Aunt Dove," said Toney, leading the way; "it will distress you to see dear Louis."

Lady Dove did not answer, but walked slowly upstairs, and Toney hurried on to warn Dr. Latham.

"I'm so glad, Mrs. Waycott; of course he may help us; he's the cleverest man in England. If I had thought it of any use, I would have asked you to send to him."

The great man was very simple in his manner, and treated the other doctor as his equal.

In another moment he was by the bedside listening to the muttered words and to Dr. Latham's quick résumé of the case. Lady Dove stood behind them and gave a glance at Louis, then she went out, followed by Sylvia, saying:

"We'll go to Mr. Russell, Antonia."

"Do, Aunt Dove; he is such a treasure, he answers all the letters of inquiries, I simply couldn't; and he's with Louis when they make me go to bed

for an hour. I can never forget his goodness. Oh, Sylvia, you are fortunate!"

Dr. Golding spoke.

"The crisis may occur at any time this evening; a very few hours may decide——"

"Yes," said Dr. Latham, "I thought so—but will there be any strength left by then?"

"I doubt it," said Dr. Golding, "but I shall stay with you."

"Can you really stay?" said Dr. Latham. "I shall be most grateful." Dr. Golding smiled.

"Lady Dove insists—carte blanche."

"Ah! that is good news; everything depends on what occurs when the crisis takes place."

"Everything. Now I'll go and tell Lady Dove our joint opinion."

Toney had retired to the dressing-room with her husband; she did not wish to hear the verdict if it was adverse. She could only bear to get through each minute as it passed. Dr. Golding followed her there.

"Dr. Latham has done all that could be done. It is thanks to him that your boy is alive. The crisis will probably come this evening. I will stay here to-night. Do not despair; now, with your leave, I will go and talk to Lady Dove." He found her with Sylvia and Mr. Russell.

"Give us hope," exclaimed Sylvia.

"Dr. Golding is here to save the boy, Sylvia," said Lady Dove, sternly.

"The crisis will probably occur to-night. I will stay until morning. May I take you to your carriage, Lady Dove, and suggest rest?" He watched the grey look and the strained eyes of the old lady.

"Dr. Golding, Louis Waycott is my heir. Of course you can save him."

Dr. Golding smiled encouragingly.

"Dr. Latham will do all that is right: you could not have a better man," he said, as he handed her to the carriage, to which remark Lady Dove vouchsafed no answer. Sylvia had only time for a few words with her lover.

"Planty, I'm trying to be a comfort to her—she seems not to mind me. Sir Evas has sent Miss Crossman away, and he is so good to Lady Dove. Oh, will dear Louis live?"

Mr. Russell shook his head.

"I fear not—I mean, I see that Dr. Latham does not think so. I can't face it; I must take Francis out for a short walk; the boy will fall ill if he gets no air."

The worst was that it was a most beautiful warm day, when the heart of man rejoices simply because he is alive. Mr. Russell, with Francis clinging to his hand, took a gentle walk.

"We mustn't be long, Planty, dear, Louis may want us."

"Yes, dear boy."

"I think we'll go to church, Planty; we can get in by the vestry door and no one won't see us. Oh, Planty, I can't bear people asking, can you?"

"They all love him."

"Oh, Planty, God loves him too, doesn't He? I do hope He doesn't want him as much as we do. He's got lots and lots of angels; He won't take Louis, will He?"

Planty couldn't answer at first, then he managed to say:

"He won't think of Himself, Francis, but He'll do what's best for us."

Then they crept unseen into the church and Francis knelt down and prayed. It was so really a prayer that it must have reached the Throne of the All-Pitying.

"Please, please, dear God, leave Louis with us: we can't, none of us, do without him, and he's my twin brother, and we do love each other so awfully much. For Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."

"I'm done, Planty, I think we'll go back. Have you said your prayer?"

Planty had not; he had just knelt and felt only a great weight which found no expression in words.

"I'm ready, Francis, come."

The tall man and the little boy walked back hand in hand comforted.

"Planty, does God hear a little troubadour's prayers?"

"I'm sure He does."

"I wonder how. Has He time to answer everybody very quickly?"

"Yes, I'm sure He has." Planty was learning by teaching.

"Thank you, dear troubadour. Planty, you do comfort people so well; I think God has heard your prayers and that He'll answer quickly."

"Yes, to-night, Francis, and I'm sure He'll answer —for the best."

The crisis came at last. A great hush fell over every one in Waycott Hall. Francis crouched in his corner almost forgotten, so anxious were the doctors. The Squire and Toney were there, and the first feeble words Louis spoke when consciousness returned were, "Mumsey, Pupsey."

"Yes, darling, here we are."

A flickering smile. "Where's Francis?"

Francis was close by.

"Here I am, dear Troubadour Louis." A brave smile this time, and then the doctors had their way and motioned silence, as one poured restoratives down his throat and the other felt his pulse. Louis seemed quite to have forgotten the fright now. Presently another feeble little sound was heard:

"Francis, where is it?"

They looked at Francis and he nodded and went on tiptoe to a chair, and getting on it he fumbled in the locker and brought down an old book, bound in brown calf at the back, with faded magenta watered cloth on the corners.

"Louis, dear troubadour, here it is. I'll put it near your hand."

"No, no," said Dr. Golding quickly.

"He won't be happy," pleaded Francis, "if he doesn't feel it. He's the President, you know."

They all smiled, they could not help it, and then they watched. There came a contented smile on the boy's lips and he closed his eyes. They still felt his pulse, they still watched in breathless silence.

"Little troubadour, rouse yourself and drink this," said Dr. Golding.

No answer; and it was Francis who stood on tiptoe.

"Louis! dear Louis, troubadours always do their duty; do drink it." Francis' voice could rouse his twin when none other could do so.

"Troubadours—their duty," Louis murmured and opened his lips, and the medicine was taken.

"Only just in time," muttered Dr. Golding. "Thank God, Latham, he can swallow it."

The crisis had come and was gone and Troubadour Louis still lived!

"I think," said the great man, going to the

drawing-room, "I think, Mrs. Waycott, it's God's will that your son shall live."

And Toney looked up at her husband and then at the doctor, whilst she joined her hands in silent thanksgiving as tears of joy ran down her cheeks.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A DEATH AND A WEDDING.

It is wonderful how quickly children pick up when once they have "turned the corner," and now joy instead of sorrow reigned in Waycott Hall. Dr. Golding had sat up all that night with Dr. Latham, to leave nothing to chance, as to food and medicine, and when the bright sunshine flooded the room all danger was over and Dr. Golding's task was done. He never forgot Mrs. Waycott's thanks as he was getting into the motor to go first to report the good news to Lady Dove before returning to town.

"Oh, Dr. Golding, we can't thank you properly, but you know Pups, I mean my father, was the best doctor that ever lived, and I know he's been watching along with you over Louis, and I know he is awfully grateful too."

Dr. Golding had very hazy thoughts about the invisible world, so that speech made him ponder.

Good news flies very quickly, especially as the villagers had collected early round the hall, and

they cheered Dr. Golding as he drove off to Aldersfield to express their own joy that Louis would live. Lady Dove received him very cordially.

"Of course, you've saved the boy, Dr. Golding. I knew you would, that's why I sent for you! Now, Mrs. Waycott would never have thought of it! She was a harum-scarum girl, and is much the same as a woman."

Dr. Golding looked at the old grey countenance and the trembling hands and did not argue.

"It has been a great pleasure to help to save a jolly little fellow—and a hero to boot."

"There isn't such another," said Lady Dove, smiling grimly; "why he sits by me and talks like a grown-up man." Then she handed the doctor a signed blank cheque and he departed thinking Lady Dove was a great and generous lady with few equals!

Two days after the Aldersfield carriage and pair drove up again to Waycott Hall, and this time Mrs. Faber was Lady Dove's companion. Anne Faber had not waited to be asked when she received Mr. Russell's letter, and taking her courage in her two hands she had presented herself to Lady Dove.

"I hear Miss Crossman has gone, Lady Dove, won't you accept my services till—you are suited?" Sylvia had had to return home to see after her brother's things before his departure, and Lady Dove looked quite smiling and grateful.

"I'm sure, Anne Faber, I'm very much obliged to you. It quite feels like old times having you here. Now I shall have a quiet life."

The smile that hovered round Anne Faber's lips meant many things, but nothing unkindly. It meant it was like old times, but with a very, very vast difference for her!

All the way to Waycott Lady Dove had talked of Louis, and how she had saved his life by telegraphing to Dr. Golding, and not a soul wished to throw doubt on this firm belief.

"Antonia says I may see the boy; why of course I shall excite him much less than his mother."

"Of course," Anne Faber assented, for who could contradict an old lady who looked so fragile.

"Evas rode over this morning and settled everything. He has been quite upset by this misfortune, but men don't feel anything very much."

"They don't show it so much as women," murmured Mrs. Faber, thinking this an attack on dear Henry's sensibility.

"They don't feel it, I tell you, Anne Faber; pray, who should know if I do not?"

"I'm so glad about Mr. Russell and Miss Hales," said Mrs. Faber, quite content to leave the last word to her ladyship.

"Yes, a very excellent engagement for her, but of course Plantagenet Russell could have done better for himself."

"Of course," answered Anne Faber; she was slipping into the old way of meek assent, and Lady Dove was visibly pleased at regaining her lost power.

Slowly she climbed up the oak stairs, but a look of real joy came into her eyes when she sank into a big arm-chair placed ready for her, and she saw a thin, small, white hand held out to her. Everybody retired except Rosa with orders that the interview was to last only ten minutes.

"Oh, Gan-Aunt Dove, it is awfully good of you to come and see me! You don't know how glad I am to see you! I've been ill and had lots of doctors, and Mumsey and Pupsey and Francis and Planty and everybody's been so jolly, but I did want to see you, because I thought you'd be proud of me."

"Proud of you! Of course I am." Lady Dove was not thinking of what she said, but she was gazing into the blue earnest eyes.

"I mean because you're my lady-love, Gan-Aunt, you know; and I did want your troubadour to do something worthy of you! I thought I should never get a chance, but I did."

A strange lump came into Lady Dove's throat.

"I was rather—too proud, my dear Louis. I—I would have preferred——"

"Oh, no! my dear Hope, you are glad that I saved some one's life, aren't you? And, you know, Gan-Aunt, I had your glove in my pocket all the

time, and Francis says it was all sort of pulpy when he found it, and he tried to dry it and then it got quite hard ! "

" That doesn't matter," said Lady Dove, still gazing at the blue earnest eyes.

" P'raps, Gan-Aunt, you'll give me another one when I get well and come to see you ; and will you go and see Sally and give her a sovereign ? "

" Give her a sovereign for being so naughty and disobedient, certainly not ! "

" Oh, yes, you will, my dear Hope ; she's awful sorry, and if she gets a sovereign she'll never forget she mustn't disobey ; and Francis says her boots were quite spoilt like your glove, and if you give me a new glove you must give Sally a sovereign for new boots, mustn't you ? "

" Very well—of course you mustn't worry about anything, Louis, my boy." Suddenly Lady Dove had a strange fancy that she was quite young—a young married woman—and that Louis was her own boy.

" Oh, thank you so very much, dear Gan-Aunt. I said you would do it if I asked you, because grand ladies were very kind to their troubadours. I can't remember anything new just yet ; but do you know, Gan-Aunt, I've got the book here under my pillow, but when Planty comes I hide it because he really wants it, but he doesn't like to say it. And, oh, Gan-Aunt, isn't it nice about Planty and Miss

Sylvia, and you'll give them a big present, won't you? Francis and I are thinking so what we'll buy them, but we haven't much pocket money."

"What nonsense to keep you boys short of pocket money, when you'll be quite a rich man, Louis, some day."

"That will be very nice," said Louis. "I've got lots of things to buy, Gan-Aunt, when I'm rich. A wreath of roses for you, made in gold, Gan-Aunt, real gold. When you come to the tournament, oh, we'll have——"

"Ten minutes is over, your ladyship," said Rosa.

"Very well; of course you must keep quiet, Louis, and I'll send the carriage for you to come and see me next time, and Anne Faber shall fetch you; and—here, my boy, take this and spend it as you like. She stooped down and put a crisp bit of paper in his hand as she kissed the boy, and she felt his small arms round her neck and heard the eager voice say:

"Good-bye, my dear Hope. You're the nicest and most beautiful Gan-Aunt in all the world; and you'll not forget Sally?"

"Make your mind easy, my darling," she said in quite a low voice, and then she departed.

At the door Toney met her; she had been talking to Mrs. Faber and telling her all about that awful waiting time.

"Aunt Dove, we are so very, very grateful to

you for sending Dr. Golding; those two wouldn't let the Angel of Death come. At one time I gave up hope; it was wrong of me."

"It certainly was, Antonia. I was sure Golding was the right man and knew his work—which he did."

That evening Lady Dove was sitting with Mrs. Faber in the drawing-room, just like old times, and Sir Evas was reading the newspaper aloud (for some time he had taken to it to prevent bickerings with Miss Crossman). Suddenly Anne Faber's soft voice stopped him.

"Oh, Sir Evas, Lady Dove—is—not well!" They both jumped up and went to her side. She had fallen back against the cushions and her knitting had fallen on her lap. Mrs. Faber rubbed her cold hands, and Sir Evas rang the bell violently. Everything was done at once to restore life, but when Dr. Latham came and felt the pulse he said quietly:

"I expected it. It was her heart—it was bound to come, Sir Evas; thank God there has been no suffering. Don't let little Louis know suddenly."

Sir Evas could not yet realize that "Poor Melina's" complaining life had come to an end, and he looked wretched and forlorn till Toney herself came hurrying to him.

"Oh, dear Uncle Evas, how strange! You

mustn't distress yourself; you have always done all you could for her. My Louis is given back to us and she is taken; and, oh! Uncle Evas, you can't think how sweet she was to him, he has told me all about it; and he looks at the five-pound note she gave him as if it were too precious to turn into money. I am so glad, so very glad, that my son gave her so much pleasure and love."

"Yes, yes, dear Toney, Melina loved that child. If she had had a son, her life would have been different; it had always weighed upon her mind. You see, Toney, she had very real affection underneath the—outside."

"Yes, Uncle Evas, I see it now."

"I feel so lost without her. I—I—shall miss her dreadfully, Toney; and you know about Louis and the property, I must do as she wished—I really must."

"You shall do just as you like, dear Uncle," said Toney smiling, and realizing now that Uncle Evas had got so used to his chains that he too "regained his freedom with a sigh."

It was Mr. Russell who undertook to break the news to Louis. He and Lady Dove had always got on well together, and she was, as Toney expressed it, "very grateful to him."

Two days after Louis was sitting up in bed for a short time, and he and Francis were having quiet talks and pretence play—they were never at a

loss for amusement—when suddenly there was a soft knock at the door, and Louis called out, "Come in."

"It's Troubadour Planty! Oh, Planty! do come, we did want you to come and talk to us about our society."

Mr. Russell sat down smiling, and wondering how to tell Louis about Lady Dove without casting a shadow on his young life. Death should not always be spoken of to the children as a gloomy ending of a Christian's life.

"The troubadours are having a holiday, and I fear when I am married I shall not be allowed any longer to belong!"

"Oh, yes, Planty, you may; I don't think that will make any difference."

"There should be none, if we are married or if we die."

"We didn't want Louis to die, did we, Planty? and you see God understood and didn't take him," said Francis quite naturally.

"But when the old people have done their work, then God takes them, Louis. Your Great-Aunt Dove has been failing for some time."

"Does God really want Gan-Aunt Dove, do you think?" said Louis meditatively.

"Yes; He knows the right time."

"I shouldn't like Gan-Aunt Dove to go now, because she's my lady-love, too."

"You would if the right time has come. It will come to all of us."

"Then the other day wasn't Louis' right time, Planty; it was a mistake, wasn't it?"

"It's your great-aunt's time now. God has called her away."

"Has He?" said both boys surprised.

"Yes, and we troubadours must be glad."

"I'm not glad," said Louis seriously.

"You must be, Louis, if God wants her," said Francis.

"I was going to give her a gold crown some day for our tournament day. Didn't she know, Planty? She ought to have told me."

"She didn't know, but she would know now it was best as it is."

"Then I'll make a crown of gold flowers for her, Planty; Jim will pick the flowers, and Francis will take it to her if I mustn't. I think she'll see it because she's God's angel now, and they can see everything."

So gradually the idea of the call became natural to them, and though they talked much about it with each other, the idea of sorrow was not their only idea. When Toney came in Louis was the first to say to her:

"Oh, Mumsey, do you know God's called Gan-Aunt Dove, and she's gone to Him because He wanted her."

"Yes, darling."

"And God was going to call Louis the other day and we asked Him not to, so He didn't," added Francis.

"And I'm going to make a gold crown of flowers for Gan-Aunt. She'll see it, won't she, Mumsey, and be awfully glad?"

"I'm sure she will, darling, she'll be awfully glad."

Of course Louis could not go to the funeral, but Francis carried the crown of gold flowers made by Louis with his mother's help; and tied on it was a card in the boy's own handwriting, "For my Gan-Aunt Dove, from her Troubadour Louis."

"Mumsey, she'll smile ever so and say, 'Thank you, my darling Louis,' won't she?"

"She will, dear," said Toney; and now at last she really believed it.

* * * * *

Sylvia Hales dated all her changed life from her engagement day and from the time of Lady Dove's death. Her brother's departure could not long be delayed, so the wedding preparations were hurried on; but then other wonderful things were settled. As soon as the wedding and the short honeymoon were over, Mr. and Mrs. Russell were to come and live at Aldersfield with Sir Evas. He could not be

left alone in the big house ; and it was arranged that the twins should go every day and do their lessons there, and so make the old home more cheerful. It was Sir Evas' own plan, for he thought " Melina would like it," and he said Mrs. Russell would find plenty to do. So it happened that Sylvia from having had a dull, quiet life found that she would become quite a responsible and important person, with more to look after than she had ever imagined it possible she could accomplish !

And perhaps in all their lives the twins had never had such a joy as the thoughts and preparations necessary for Planty's wedding.

Their dear troubadour should have such a wedding as never was. Such endless consultations followed ; and when he was well Louis was allowed to carry out Lady Dove's idea, and go to London and choose her present of plate for Planty. But one loving cup given by the twins had engraved on it, " From the President and Troubadour Francis to Troubadour Planty."

Then they settled they were to be dressed as " real troubadours " and carry the bride's train ; and Planty's wife was to have a lovely, lovely train and lots of flowers ; and all the villagers were to come and see it and have flowers too.

Happily for Toney's peace of mind the old troubadours' book had no pictures ; but the twins had many wonderful ideas which had to be carried

out, as Toney and the Squire were rather weak just then and found it very difficult to say "no" to the son they had so nearly lost.

And the wedding itself was a series of perfect joys to the twins. Planty was with them, and they were to accompany him down to the church.

"Oh, Planty, we did think you would be dressed as a troubadour; I 'spect you want to really. Do look at us."

They did look perfectly charming, and Planty said so.

"You won't mind if Miss Sylvia takes me for her troubadour, will you, Planty?" said Louis.

"No," said Planty, "I shall be delighted."

"Francis has got one, you know, but he never sees her, but Mumsey's asked her for the wedding; but now Gan-Aunt's gone to heaven I must find another," said Louis meditatively.

Then the Aldersfield carriage and pair came to take the troubadours to church, and as Toney had undertaken the wedding, nothing was left to be desired; and Mr. Hales looked very happy as the Squire gave his sister away and he read the service. And behind the bride the troubadour pages looked at everything and everybody, taking notes for the future; and then at last the wedding was over and every one retired to Waycott Hall.

Toney insisted on an old-fashioned breakfast, and it was the most glorious meal that had ever been

partaken of in Waycott Hall, so the troubadours said. All the friends and relations of both families were there, just as if Mr. Russell had been one of the family. And after Louis and Francis had helped to cut the wedding cake, Planty rose to make a speech, quite out of his turn; and immediately there was very loud cheering, led by the troubadours.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I rise," said Plantagenet Russell, "to propose a toast—not to the usual bridegroom, which of course is not my province, but to the President of the Troubadour Society; because if it had not been for him, and for his brother, there would not have been a bridegroom here to-day! I want to make a confession—I want to own that at first I wasn't very partial to our society, and if I could have turned that stream into another channel I would willingly have done so, but it was beyond me. My President knew best, and he chose me as a troubadour, and, further, he chose my lady-love, whom you see here to-day." (Very loud cheers.) "And so I wish to say I think our society is the best of any society I know—and that our President is the bravest and best in the society."

Everybody drank this toast very heartily, and then Louis was told to answer it. He rose, at first feeling rather shy, but he soon forgot that.

"Ladies and gentlemen" (Planty had begun so,

so he did too), "I'm awfully glad that Planty—I mean Mr. Russell—is really glad to be a troubadour, and that he is quite glad, too, about his lady-love. Francis and I think she's awfully pretty in her wedding dress, but if Mr. Russell wants another lady-love we'll look about for one for him." (Cheers and loud laughter.) "I want to confess, too, I was awfully jealous of Planty—I mean Mr. Russell —when he saved his lady from the bull, and I thought I'd never get a chance of an adventure, but I did, and I'm awfully glad. But Mr. Russell has forgotten Troubadour Francis and Pasha Jones; if they hadn't come I couldn't have kept up so long in the water; so please drink Pasha Jones' health, for he's quite a hero-dog. Troubadour Francis, too, ought to be cheered because he jumped into the water, though he couldn't swim hardly at all. And, please, I hope you will all join the society; you are sure to get adventures with bulls and drowning people, or other things, and it's awfully nice."

The President raised his glass, and everybody drank again amidst much merriment to all the troubadours and their past and future adventures. After this the Squire rose to propose the health of the bride and bridegroom in quite an ordinary manner, which sounded very tame after the other speeches, but which was, however, received with great enthusiasm; as was the marriage-song which

Francis had composed for the occasion, and which his godfather said was simple and lovely; so that Louis looked with great admiration all the time at his brother's ears, for there, he knew, lay the magic which was hidden from him.

In the afternoon all the parish friends met to share in the general rejoicings and to give a fine send-off to the bride and bridegroom. But what they really cared for most was the sight of the two troubadours—"Miss Toney's twins. God bless her and them!"

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